Weird Tales

FEB. 1932

The Unique Magazine

25 CENTS

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By

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

and

E. HOFFMANN PRICE

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W. T. 1

Weird Tales

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VOLUME XIX NUMBER 2

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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IN OUR November Eyrie we asked you, the readers, whether you wanted us to print more pseudo-scientific stories than we have been printing. Your replies have nearly all been opposed to such a suggestion. It seems to be the consensus that we should publish one or two weird-scientific stories in each issue, but no more.

"One of the best features of WEIRD TALES is the pleasing variety of your stories," writes Albertine Ganz, of St. Louis. "I like the stories of Edmond Hamilton immensely, and other scientific stories by your excellent writers. However, I would not like to see too many stories of that one type in WEIRD TALES. One is enough in each issue, or two at most."

Cybelline Maird, of La Grange, Illinois, writes to the Eyrie: "I have admired your publication for a long time. What especially appeals to me is the versatility of the types of stories which you publish. You seem to have space-stories, stories of the future, past, present, stories of all atmospheres, instead of confining yourself to one type. You could say that your magazine is a summary of all types of super-imaginative prose; and it is no small honor to you that all the stories of Edgar Allan Poe could be placed in your magazine with the stories of modern authors and they would fit perfectly. Many of the stories are incomparably written, such as *The Black Stone*. Others, while not written with the style of a master, show the more fertile even though less trained pen of young writers."

"I have never before written you a word of adverse criticism," writes Paul S. Smith, of Orange, New Jersey, "because I know that you are trying to put out as good a magazine as you can and because as he tries to please every one, an editor's life sometimes, like a policeman's, is not a happy one. But there are three stories in the December issue on which I must offer some non-commendatory statements. *The Dark Man* is an adventure story pure and simple, and is best suited to a magazine like 'Adventure.' It is well written and contains a superabundance of fighting and bloodshed for those who like these things, but it is not the least bit weird. However, many of your readers will like it—so that's that. *Dead Man's Vengeance* is an excellent Western story and its proper place would be in a Western story magazine. The touches of weirdness it contains are so slight that I honestly believe it is too mild for your magazine. *Bitter Gold* is a very fine little story and I am glad to have read it. This tale is grim and tragic but not weird. Here are three stories in one issue, not one of which is genuinely weird. Fie, fie, sir! Is not WEIRD TALES to be kept weird? I feel that I am between the devil and the deep sea in criticizing

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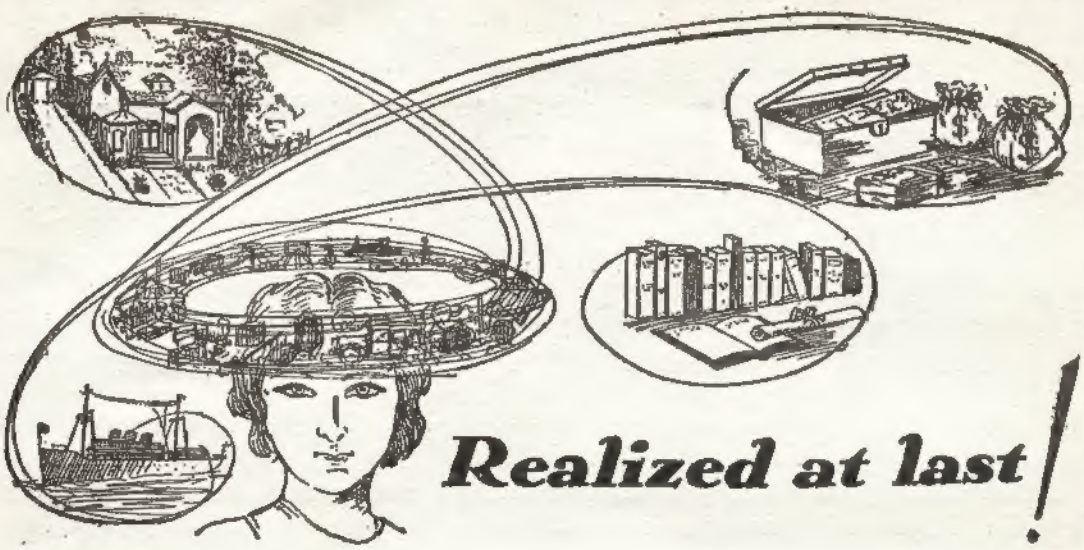

Your Thought Pictures Turned Into Realities

VISUALIZING and dreaming of the things you need in life only creates them in the mind and does not bring them into living realities of usefulness. If you can visualize easily or if there are certain definite needs in your life which you can plainly see in your mind and are constantly visualizing them as the dreams of your life, you should waste no more time in holding them in the thought world but bring them into the material world of realities. What your mind can think and create, you can bring into realization if you know how. Don't waste your life and happiness that should be yours by dreaming of the things you need. Make them become your possessions and serve you.

I Have Found the Real, Simple Way

For years I dreamed of the things I wanted and searched in vain for ways to bring the dreams into realization. I followed all the methods of concentration and I used affirmations and formulas to bring things to me from the so-called abundant supply of the Cosmic, but still I dreamed on and on without any realization of my fondest hopes. All of the instructions I read and lectures I heard simply helped me to build up thought pictures in my mind and to visualize more clearly the things I needed, but nothing brought them into realization.

I had heard of the strange Oriental methods which enabled the people of foreign lands to turn thoughts into real things and so I searched among their ancient writings to discover their secret process. Then I found a key to the whole system in a book that explains what the Rosicrucians and the mystics of Egypt knew so well. By this simple method I changed the whole course of my life and began my life over again in happiness and prosperity. I found at last the simple way to turn my thought pictures into realizations.

A Surprising, FREE, Helpful Book

You need not search as I had to for I will be happy to send you a fascinating book that tells a different story than any you may have ever read and it explains how you, too, may use the simple methods which I found and which have helped thousands to start new lives creating out of their mind power the things they need in life. I will be glad to send you this book, if you are sincere, called "THE LIGHT OF EGYPT," if you will write to me personally asking for it.

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(Continued from page 148)

Dead Man's Vengeance and *Bitter Gold,* because these are two of the best stories in the December issue considered as stories; but I can not regard them as being weird tales. So let's have more weirdness, more utter strangeness, more unearthliness, more ghastliness, more bizarre psychic horror and, if I may coin the word, more Lovecraftness. For a ghost story *Deserter* is highly satisfactory. I vote for *Creatures of the Comet* as the best story in the December issue. Edmond Hamilton can always be depended upon to give us an entertaining yarn no matter what he writes about. He does so well with non-astronomical stories that I often wish he would write more of this kind. I think his *Pigmy Island* is one of the best stories you ever published. Several Gullivers in a new Brobdingnag. It is an engaging theme! I believe, taking all in all, that *Deserter* is the second best story for December."

A letter to the Eyrie from M. Sears, of Hartford, Connecticut, says: "I have never missed a copy of your magazine in years, but I wish to complain at the number of serials. In my estimation one serial is plenty, but three are an imposition—and especially a reprint. I will say this, though—that Seabury Quinn's stories are without equal. I hope my criticism is constructive rather than destructive."

"The story *Placide's Wife* by Kirk Mashburn, which you published in the November issue of WEIRD TALES, is a dandy," writes A. M. Patterson, of Huntsville, Alabama. "Tell him to keep up the good work, and to give us more stories of that interesting old state of Louisiana. *Placide's Wife* shows a thorough knowledge, on the part of the writer, of conditions and the people about whom the story is written."

"*Placide's Wife* was an excellent story," writes E. E. O'Brien, of Philadelphia. "I overheard two of my friends conversing on the cover page of the November issue, and the story *Placide's Wife,* so I decided to read it myself. I found it every bit as interesting as they described it. Congratulations to Kirk Mashburn. I also greatly enjoyed *The Second-Hand Limousine* by Harold Markham."

"*The Wolf-Leader* gets better with every issue," writes A. V. Pershing, of Kenova, West Virginia. "*The Dark Man* by Howard is a masterpiece. The December issue was the best in some time. *The Haunted Chair* starts out as a good mystery story."

Bruce Bryan, of Los Angeles, writes: "Although I did not think the December issue quite up to snuff, my vote for best story is for Arthur Woodward's *Lord of the Talking Heads.* This is well told and well climaxed, as well as being very unusual. This, of course, is not counting the serials, which I never read until they have been completed. I think in this issue, by the way, you have too many continued stories—three altogether out of the total of nine. Howard's *The Dark Man,* while interesting, can not compare to *The Gods of Bal-Sagoth.* Hamilton's is the same old stuff. *Deserter* was pretty good, but *Bitter Gold* I have read over and over again, same idea, same circumstances, same characters, same locale, same manner of narration, same everything. I have seen it as a short screen subject, too. It is a darn good story, but like some of our darn good jokes it begins to wear off. The bit of verse, *Ghost,* is the finest you have had in quite a while."

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes: "As I expected, the last installment of *Tam,*

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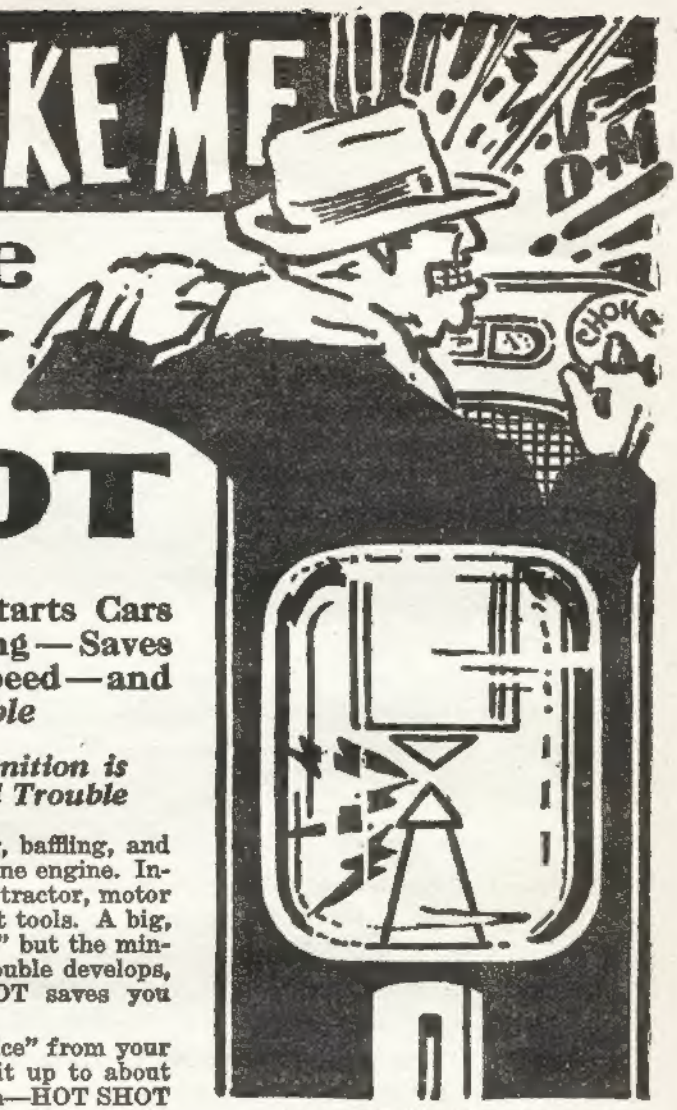
DON'T CHOKE ME



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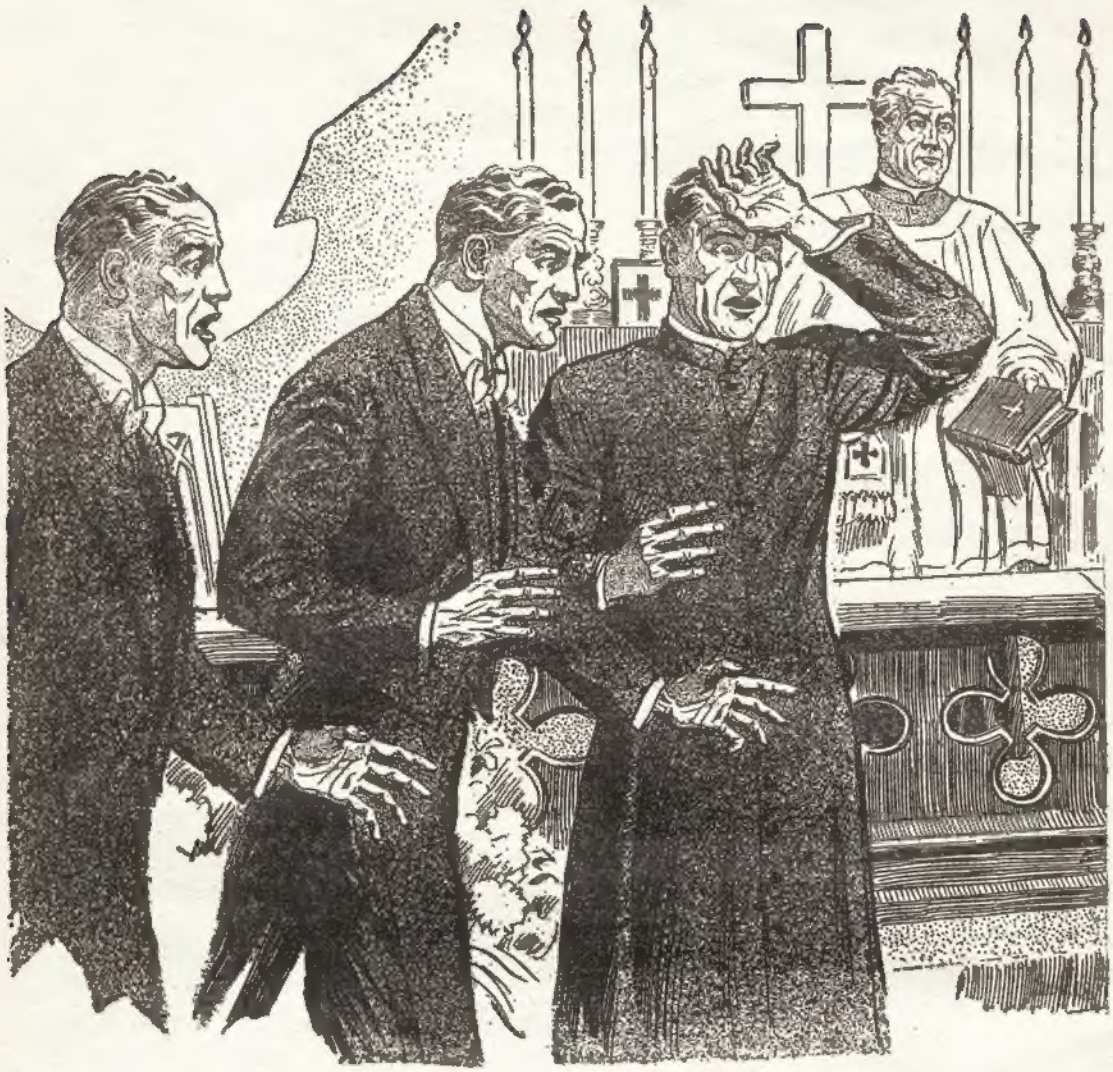


The Devil's Bride

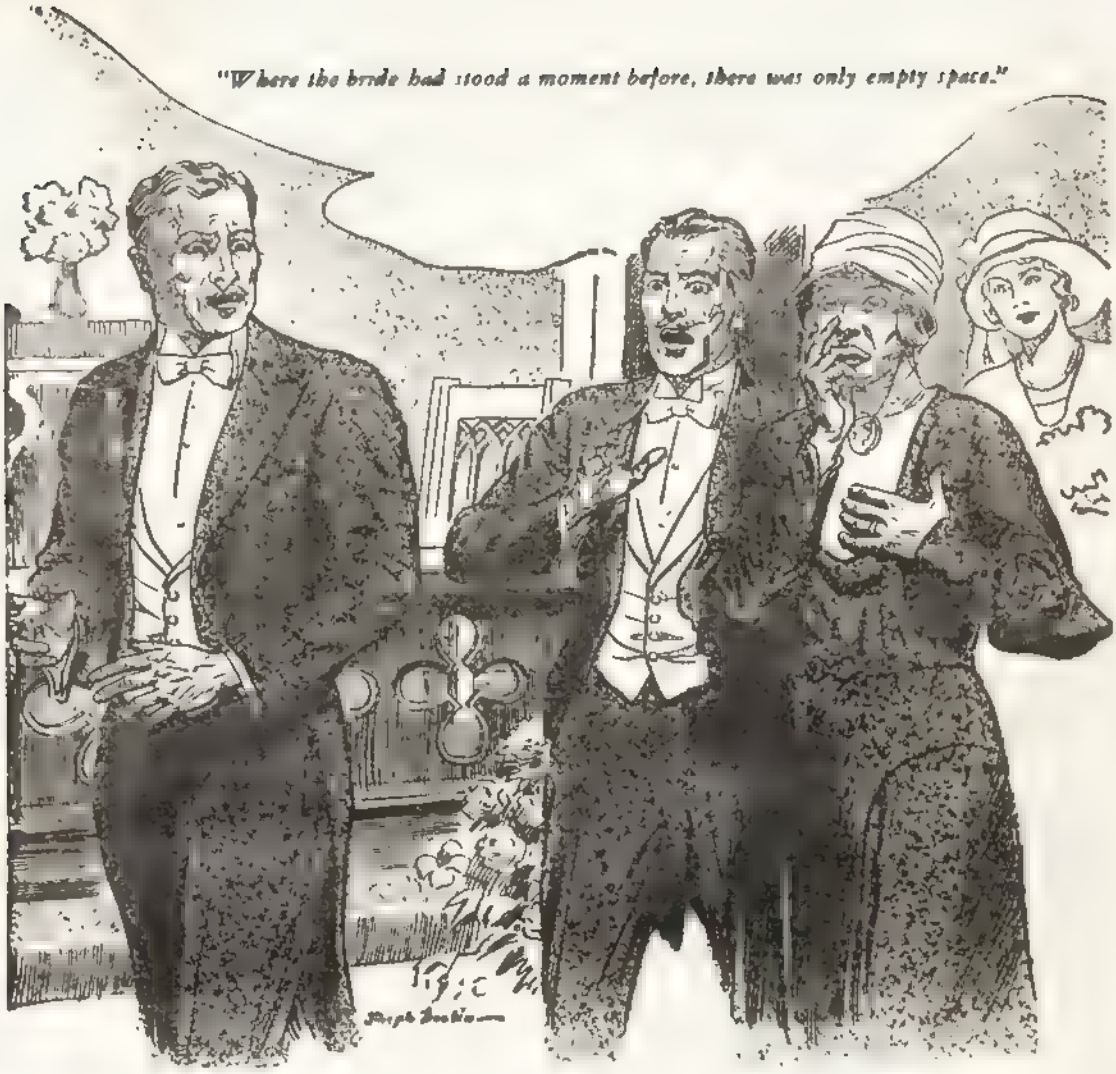
By SEABURY QUINN

A thrilling tale of devil-worship, in which weirdness, adventure, humor, mystery and pathos are superbly mingled

1. *"Alice, Where Are You?"*

FIVE of us sat on the twin divans flanking the fireplace where the eucalyptus logs burned brightly on their polished-brass andirons, throwing kaleidoscopic patterns of highlights and shadows on the ivory-enameled woodwork and rug-strewn floor of the "Ancestors' Room" at Twelvetrees.

Old David Hume, who dug Twelvetrees' foundations three centuries ago, had planned that room as shrine and temple to his *lar familiaris,* and to it each succeeding generation of the house had



"Where the bride had stood a moment before, there was only empty space."

added some memento of itself. The wide bay window at the east was fashioned from the carved poop of a Spanish galleon captured by a buccaneering member of the family and brought home to the quiet Jersey village where he rested while he planned new forays on the Antilles. The tiles about the fireplace, which told the story of the fall of man in blue-and-white Dutch delft, were a record of successful trading by another long-dead Hume who flourished in the days when Nieuw Amsterdam claimed all the land between the Hudson and the Delaware, and held it from the Swedes till Britain with her lust for empire took it for herself and from it shaped the none too loyal colony of New Jersey. The carpets on the floor, the books and bric-a-brac on the shelves, each object of *vertu* within the glass-doored cabinets, had something to relate of Hume adventures on sea or land whether as pirates, patriots, traders or explorers, sworn enemies of law or duly constituted bailiffs of authority.

Adventure ran like ichor in the Hume veins, from David, founder of the family, who came none knew whence with his strange, dark bride and settled on the rising ground beside the Jersey meadows, to Ronald, last male of the line, who went down to flames and glory when his

plane was cut out from its squadron and fell blazing like a meteor to the shell-scarred earth at Neuve Chapelle. His *croix de guerre,* posthumously awarded, lay in the cabinet beside the sword the Continental Congress had presented to his great-great-grandsire in lieu of long arrearage of salary.

Across the fire from us, between her mother and her fiancé, sat Alice, final remnant of the line, her half-humorous, half-troubled glance straying to each of us in turn as she finished speaking. She was a slender wisp of girlhood with a mass of chestnut hair with deep, shadow-laden waves which clustered in curling tendrils at the nape of her neck, a pale, clear complexion, the ivory tones of which were enhanced by the crimson of her wide, sensitive mouth and the long, silken lashes and purple depths of the slightly slanting eyes which gave her face a piquant, oriental flavor.

"You say the message is repeated constantly, *Mademoiselle?*" asked Jules de Grandin, my diminutive French friend, as he cast a fleeting look of unqualified approval at the slim satin slipper and silk-sheathed leg the girl displayed as she sat with one foot doubled under her.

"Yes, it's most provoking when you're trying to get some inkling of the future, especially at such a time as this, to have the silly thing keep saying——"

"Alice, dear," Mrs. Hume remonstrated, "I wish you wouldn't trifle with such silly nonsense, particularly now, when——" She broke off with what would unquestionably have been a sniff in any one less certainly patrician than Arabella Hume, and glanced reprovingly at her daughter.

De Grandin tweaked the needle-pointed tips of his little blond mustache and grinned the gamin grin which endeared him to dowager and debutante alike. "It is mysterious, as you have said, *Mademoiselle,*" he agreed, "but are you sure you did not guide the board——"

"Of course I am," the girl broke in. "Just wait; I'll show you." Placing her coffee cup upon the Indian mahogany tabouret, she leaped petulantly from the couch and hurried from the room, returning in a moment with a ouija board and table.

"Now watch," she ordered, putting the contrivance on the couch beside her. "John, you and Doctor Trowbridge and Doctor de Grandin put your hands on the table, and I'll put mine between them, so you can feel the slightest tightening of my muscles. That way you'll be sure I'm not guiding the thing, even unintentionally. Ready?"

Feeling decidedly sheepish, I rose and joined them, resting my finger tips on the little three-legged table. Young Davisson's hand was next mine, de Grandin's next to his, and between all rested Alice's slender, cream-white fingers. Mrs. Hume viewed the spectacle with silent disapproval.

For a moment we bowed above the ouija board, waiting tensely for some motion of the table. Gradually a feeling of numbness crept through my hands and wrists as I held them in the strained and unfamiliar pose. Then, with a sharp and jerky start the table moved, first right, then left, then in an ever-widening circle till it swung sharply toward the upper left-hand corner of the board, pausing momentarily at the A, then traveling swiftly to the L, thence with constant acceleration back to I. Quickly the message was spelled out; a pause, and then once more the three-word sentence was repeated:

ALICE COME HOME

"There!" the girl exclaimed, a catch, half fright, half annoyance, in her voice. "It spelled those very words three times

today. I couldn't get it to say anything else!"

"Rot. All silly nonsense," John Davisson declared, lifting his hands from the table and gazing almost resentfully at his charming fiancée. "You may believe you didn't move the thing, dear, but you must have, for——"

"Doctor de Grandin, Doctor Trowbridge," the girl appealed, "you held my hands just now. You'd have known if I'd made even the slightest move to guide the table, wouldn't you?" We nodded silent agreement, and she hurried on:

"That's just what's puzzling me. Why should a girl who's going to be married tomorrow be telling herself, subconsciously or otherwise, to 'come home'? If the board had spelt 'Go home,' perhaps it would have made sense, for we're going to our own place when we come back from our wedding trip; but why the constant repetition of 'Come home,' I'd like to know. Do you suppose——"

The raucous hooting of an automobile horn broke through her question and a moment later half a dozen girls accompanied by as many youths stormed into the big hall.

"Ready, old fruit?" called Irma Sherwood, who was to be the maid of honor. "We'd better be stepping on the gas; the church is all lit up and Doctor Cuthbert's got the organ all tuned and humming." She threw a dazzling smile at us and added, "This business of getting Alice decently married is more trouble than running a man down for myself, Doctor Trowbridge. One more rehearsal of these nuptials and I'll be a candidate for a sanitarium."

ST. CHRYSOSTOM'S was all alight when we arrived at the pentice and paused beside the baptismal font awaiting the remainder of the bridal party; for, as it ever is with lovers, John and Alice had lagged behind the rest to exchange a few banalities of the kind relished only by idiots, little children and those engaged to wed.

"Sorry to delay the show, friends and fellow citizens," Alice apologized as she leaped from Davisson's roadster and tossed her raccoon coat aside. "The fact is, John and I had something of importance to discuss, and"—she raised both hands to readjust her hat—"and so we lingered by the way to——"

"Alice!" Mrs. Hume's voice betokened shocked propriety and hopeless protest at the antics of her daughter's graceless generation. "You're *surely* not going to wear that—that thing in church?" Her indignant glance indicated the object of her wrath. "Why, it's hardly decent," she continued, then paused as though vocabulary failed her while she pointed mutely to the silver girdle which was clasped about her daughter's slender waist.

"Of course, I shall, old dear," the girl replied. "The last time one of us was married she wore it, and the one before wore it, too. Hume women always wear this girdle when they're married. It brings 'em luck and insures big fam——"

"Alice!" the sharp, exasperated interruption cut her short. "If you have to be indelicate, at least you might remember where we are."

"All right, Mater, have it your own way, but the girdle gets worn, just the same," the girl retorted, pirouetting slowly, so that the wide belt's polished bosses caught flashes from the chandelier and flung them back in gleaming, lance-like rays.

"Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle, what is it that you wear? May I see it, may I examine it?" de Grandin demanded excitedly, bending forward to obtain a closer view of the shining corselet.

"Of course," the girl replied. "Just a moment, till I get it off." She fumbled

at a fastening in front, undid a latch of some sort and put the gleaming girdle in his hand.

It was a beautiful example of barbaric jewelry, a belt, perhaps a corset would be the better term, composed of two curved plates of hammered silver so formed as to encircle the wearer's abdomen from front to hips, joined together at the back by a wide band of flexible brown leather of exquisitely soft texture. In front the stomach-plates were locked together by four rings with a long silver pin which went through them like a loose rivet, with a little ball at the top fastened by a chain of cold-forged silver links. The metal was heavily bossed and rather crudely set with a number of big red and yellow stones. From each plate depended seven silver chains, each terminating in a heart-shaped ornament carved from the same kind of stones with which the belt was jeweled, and these clanked and jingled musically as the little Frenchman held the thing up to the light and gazed at it with a look of mingled fascination and repulsion. *"Grand Dieu!"* he exclaimed softly. "It is! I can not be mistaken; it is assuredly one of them, but——"

Alice bent smilingly across his shoulder. "Nobody knows quite what it is or where it comes from," she explained, "but there's a tradition in the family that David Hume's mysterious bride brought it with her as a part of her marriage portion. For years every daughter of the house wore it to be married, and it's been known as 'the luck of the Humes' for goodness knows how long. The legend is that the girl who wears it will keep her beauty and her husband's love and have an easy time in child——"

"Alice!" Once more her mother intervened.

"All right, Mother, I won't say it," her daughter laughed, "but even nice girls know you don't find babies in a cabbage-head nowadays." Then, to de Grandin:

"I'm the first Hume girl in three generations, and the last of the family in the bargain; so I'm going to wear the thing for whatever luck there is in it, no matter what anybody says."

The answering smile de Grandin gave her was rather forced. "You do not know whence it comes, nor what its history is?" he asked.

"No, we don't," Mrs. Hume returned, before her daughter could reply, "and I'm heartily sorry Alice found the thing. I almost wish I'd sold it when I had the chance."

"Eh?" he turned upon her almost sharply. "How is that, *Madame?"*

"A foreign gentleman called the other day and said he understood we had this thing among our curios and that it might be for sale. He was very polite, but quite insistent that I let him see it. When I told him it was not for sale he seemed greatly disappointed and begged me to reconsider. He even offered to allow me to set whatever price I cared to, and assured me there would be no quibble over it, even though we asked a hundred times the belt's intrinsic worth. I fancy he was an agent with *carte blanche* from some wealthy collector, he seemed so utterly indifferent where money was concerned."

"And did he, by any chance, inform you what this belt may be, or whence it came?" de Grandin queried.

"Why, no; he merely described it, and begged to be allowed to see it. One hardly likes to ask such questions from a chance visitor, you know."

"Précisément. One understands, *Madame,"* he nodded.

THE procession was quickly marshaled, and attended by her maids, Alice marched serenely up the aisle. As she had no male relative to do the office, the duty of giving her in marriage was del-

egated to me, both she and her mother declaring that no one more deserved the honor than the one who had assisted her into the world and brought her through the measles, chickenpox and whooping-cough.

"And we'll have Trowbridge somewhere in the first one's name, old dear," Alice promised in a whisper as she patted my arm while we halted momentarily at the chancel steps.

"Now, when Doctor Bentley has pronounced the warning 'if no one offers an impediment to the marriage,' " the curate who was acting as master of ceremonies informed us, "you will proceed to the communion rail and——"

Somewhere outside, faint and faraway-seeming, but gaining quickly in intensity, there came a high, thin, whistling sound, piercing, but so high one could scarcely hear it. Rather, it seemed more like a screaming heard inside the head than any outward sound, and strangely, it seemed to circle round the three of us—the bride, the bridegroom and me—and to cut us definitely off from the remainder of the party.

"Queer," I thought. "There was no wind a moment ago, yet——" The thin, high whining closed tighter round us, and involuntarily I put my hands to my ears to shut out the intolerable sharpness of it, when with a sudden crash the painted window just above the altar burst as though a missile struck it, and through the ragged aperture came drifting a billowing yellow haze—a cloud of saffron dust, it seemed to me—which hovered momentarily above the unveiled cross upon the altar, then dissipated slowly, like steam evaporating in winter air.

I felt an odd sensation, almost like a heavy blow delivered to my chest, as I watched the yellow mist disintegrate, then straightened with a start as another sound broke on my hearing.

"Alice! Alice, where are you?" the bridegroom called, and through the bridal party ran a wondering murmur:

"Where's Alice? She was right there a moment ago! Where *is* she? Where's she gone?"

I blinked my eyes and shook my head. It was so. Where the bride had stood, her fingers resting lightly on my arm, a moment before, there was only empty space.

Wonderingly at first, then eagerly, at last with a frenzy bordering on madness, we searched for her. Nowhere, either in the church or vestry room or parish house, was sign or token of the missing bride, nor could we find a trace of her outside the building. Her coat and motor gloves lay in a crumpled heap within the vestibule; the car in which she came to the church still stood beside the curb; an officer whose beat had led him past the door two minutes earlier declared he had seen no one leave the edifice—had seen no one on the block, for that matter. Yet, discuss and argue as we might, search, seek and call, then tell ourselves it was no more than a silly girl's wild prank, the fact remained: Alice Hume was gone—vanished as utterly as though absorbed in air or swallowed by the earth, and all within less time than the swiftest runner could have crossed the chancel, much less have left the church beneath the gaze of half a score of interested people for whom she was the center of attraction.

"She must have gone home," some one suggested as we paused a moment in our search and gazed into each other's wondering eyes. "Of course, that's it! She's gone back to Twelvetrees!" the others chorused, and by the very warmth of their agreement gave tokens of dissent.

At last the lights were dimmed, the church deserted, and the bridal party, murmuring like frightened children to each other, took up their way toward

Twelvetrees, to which, we were agreed, the missing bride had fled.

But as we started on our way, young Davisson, with a lover's prescience of evil to his loved one, gave tongue to the question which trembled silently on every lip. "Alice!" he cried out to the unresponsive night, and the tremor in his voice was eloquent of his heart's agony, "Alice, beloved—*where are you?*"

2. Bulala-Gwai

"COMING?" I asked as the sorrowful little motorcade began its pilgrimage to Twelvetrees.

De Grandin shook his head in short negation. "Let them go on," he ordered. "Later, when they have left, we may search the house for Mademoiselle Alice, though I greatly doubt we shall find her. Meanwhile, there is that here which I would investigate. We can work more efficiently when there are no well-meaning nincompoops to harass us with senseless questions. Come." He turned on his heel and led the way back into the church.

"Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he began as we walked up the aisle, "when that window yonder broke, did you see, or seem to see, a cloud of yellowness drift through the opening?"

"Why, yes, I thought so," I replied. "It looked to me like a puff of muddy fog—smoke, perhaps—but it vanished so quickly that——"

"Très bien," he nodded. "That is what I wished to know. None of the others mentioned seeing it and our eyes play strange tricks on us at times. I thought perhaps I might have been mistaken, but your testimony is enough for me."

With a murmur of excuse, as though apologizing for the sacrilege, he moved the bishop's chair to a point beside the altar, mounted nimbly on its tall, carved back, and examined the stone casing of the broken window intently. From my station outside the communion rail I could hear him swearing softly and excitedly in mingled French and English as he drew a card from his pocket, scraped something from the window-sill upon the card, then carefully descended from his lofty perch.

"Behold, regard, attend me, if you will, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "Observe what I have found." As he extended the card toward me I saw a line of light, yellow powder, like pollen from a flower, gathered along one edge.

"Regardez!" he commanded sharply, raising the slip of pasteboard level with my face. "Now, if you please, what did I do?"

"Eh?" I asked, puzzled.

"Your hearing functions normally. What is it that I did?"

"Why, you showed me that card, and——"

"Precisely. And——?" He paused with interrogatively arched brows.

"And that's all."

"Non. Not at all. By no means, my friend," he denied. "Attend me: First I did, as you have said, present the card to you. Next, when it was fairly level with your nostrils, I did blow on it, oh so gently, so that some of the powder on it was inhaled by you. Next I raised my arms three times above my head, lowered them again, then capered round you like a dancing Indian. Finally, I did tweak you sharply by the nose."

"Tweak me by the nose!" I echoed aghast. "You're crazy!"

"Like the fox, as your slang so drolly expresses it," he returned with a nod. "My friend, it has been exactly one minute and forty seconds by my watch since you did inhale that so tiny bit of dust, and during all that time you were as utterly oblivious to all that happened as

though you had been under ether. Yes. When first I saw it I suspected. Now I have submitted it to the test and am positive it is so."

"What on earth are you talking about?" I asked.

"*Bulala-gwai,* no less."

"Bu—*what?*"

He seated himself in the bishop's chair, crossed his knees and regarded me with the fixed, unwinking stare which always reminded me of an earnest tom-cat. "Attend me," he commanded. "My duties as an army medical officer and as a member of *la Sûreté,* have taken me to many places off the customary map of tourists. The Congo Français, by example. It was there that I first met *bulala-gwai,* which was called by our gendarmes the snuff of death, sometimes *la petite mort,* or little death.

"*Barbe d'un rat vert,* but it is well named, my friend! A traveler journeying through the interior once lay down to rest on his camp bed within his tent. He meant to sleep for thirty minutes only. When he awoke he found that twenty-six hours had gone — likewise all his paraphernalia. Native robbers had inserted a tube beneath his tent flap, blown a minute pinch of their death snuff into the enclosure, then boldly entered and helped themselves to all of his effects. Again, a tiny paper torpedo of the stuff was thrown through the window of a locomotive cab while it stood on a siding. Both engineer and fireman were rendered unconscious for ten hours, during which time the natives denuded the machine of every movable part. So powerful an anesthetic is *bulala-gwai* that so much of it as can be gotten on a penknife's point, if blown into a room fourteen feet square will serve to paralyze every living thing within the place for several minutes.

"The secret of its formula is close-guarded, but I have been assured by witch-men of the Congo that it can be made in two strengths, one to kill at once, the other to stupefy, and it is a fact to which I can testify that it is sometimes used successfully to capture both elephants and lions alive.

"I once went with the local inspector of police to examine premises which had been burglarized with the aid of this so powerful sleeping-powder, and on the window-sill we did behold a minute quantity of it. The inspector scooped it up on a card and called a native gendarme to him, then blew it in the negro's face. The stuff had lost much potency by exposure to the air, but still it was so powerful that the black was totally unconscious for upward of five minutes, and did not move a muscle when the inspector struck him a stinging blow on the cheek and even touched a lighted cigarette against his hand. Not only that, when finally he awakened he did not realize he had been asleep at all, and would not believe us till we showed him the blister where the cigarette had burned him.

"Very good. It is twenty years and more since I beheld this powder from the Devil's snuff-box, but when I saw that yellow cloud come floating through the broken window, and when I realized Mademoiselle Alice had decamped unseen by us before our very eyes, I said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, here, it seems, is evidence of *bulala-gwai,* and nothing else.'

" 'You may be right, Jules de Grandin,' I answered me, 'but still you are not sure. Wait until the others have departed with their silly gabble-gabble, then ask Friend Trowbridge if he also saw the yellow cloud. He knows nothing of *bulala-gwai,* but if he saw that fog of yellowness, you may depend upon it there was such a thing.'

"And so I waited, and when you did agree with me, I searched, and having

searched I found that which I sought and —forgive me, good friend!—as there was no other laboratory material at hand, I did test the stuff on you, and now I am convinced. Yes, I damn know how they spirited Mademoiselle Alice away while our eyes were open and unseeing. Who it was that stole her, and why he did it—that is for us to discover as quickly as may be."

He felt for his cigarette case and thoughtfully extracted a "Maryland," then, remembering where he was, replaced it. "Let us go," he ordered. "Perhaps the chatterers have become tired of useless searching at Twelvetrees, and we can get some information from Madame Hume."

"But if this *bulala*—this sleeping-powder, whatever its native name is—was used here, it's hardly likely Alice has gone back to Twelvetrees, is it?" I objected. "And what possible information can Mrs. Hume give? She knows as little about it all as you or I."

"One wonders," he replied, as we left the church and climbed into my car. "At any rate, perhaps she can tell us more of that *sacré* girdle which Mademoiselle Alice wore."

"I noticed you seemed surprized when you saw it," I returned. "Did you recognize it?"

"Perhaps," he answered cautiously. "At least, I have seen others not unlike it."

"Indeed? Where?"

"In Kurdistan. It is a Yezidee bridal belt, or something very like it."

"A what?"

"A girdle worn by virgins who—but I forget, you do not know.

"The work of pacifying subject peoples is one requiring all the white man's ingenuity, my friend, as your countrymen who have seen service in the Philippines will tell you. In 1922 when French authority was flouted in Arabia, I was dispatched there on a secret mission. Eventually my work took me to Deir-er-Zor, Anah, finally to Bagdad and across British Irak to the Kurdish border. There—no matter in what guise—I penetrated Mount Lalesh and the holy city of the Yezidees.

"These Yezidees are a mysterious sect scattered throughout the Orient from Manchuria to the Near East, but strongest in North Arabia, and feared and loathed alike by Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Taoist and Moslem, for they are worshippers of Satan.

"Their sacred mountain, Lalesh, stands north of Bagdad on the Kurdish border near Mosul, and on it is their holy and forbidden city which no stranger is allowed to enter, and there they have a temple, reared on terraces hewn from the living rock, in which they pay homage to the image of a serpent as the beguiler of man from pristine innocence. Beneath the temple are gloomy caverns, and there, at dead of night, they perform strange and bloody rites before an idol fashioned like a peacock, whom they call Malek Taos, the viceroy of Shaitan—the Devil—upon earth.

"According to the dictates of the Khitab Asward, or Black Scripture, their Mir, or pope, has brought to him as often as he may desire the fairest daughters of the sect, and these are his to do with as he chooses. When the young virgin is prepared for the sacrifice she dons a silver girdle, like the one we saw on Mademoiselle Alice tonight. I saw one on Mount Lalesh. Its front is hammered silver, set with semi-precious stones of red and yellow—never blue, for blue is heaven's color, and therefore is accursed among the Yezidees who worship the Arch-Demon. The belt's back is of leather, sometimes from the skin of a lamb untimely taken from its mother, sometimes of a kid's

skin, but in exceptional cases, where the woman to be offered is of noble birth and notable lineage, it is made of tanned and carefully prepared human skin—a murdered babe's by preference. Such was the leather of Mademoiselle Alice's girdle. I recognized it instantly. When one has examined a human hide tanned into leather he can not forget its feel and texture, my friend."

"But this is dreadful—unthinkable!" I protested. "Why should Alice wear a girdle made of human skin?"

"That is precisely what we have to ascertain tonight, if possible," he told me. "I do not say Madame Hume can give us any direct information, but she may perchance let drop some hint that will set us on the proper track. No," he added as he saw protest forming on my lips, "I do not intimate she has wilfully withheld anything she knows. But in cases such as this there are no such things as trifles. Some bit of knowledge which she thinks of no importance may easily prove the key to this so irritating mystery. One can but hope."

ANOTHER car, a little roadster of modish lines, opulent with gleaming chromium, drew abreast of us as we halted at the gateway of the Hume house. Its driver was a woman, elegantly dressed, sophisticated, *chic* from the crown of her tightly fitting black felt hat to the tips of her black leather gloves. As she slackened speed and leaned toward us, our headlights' rays struck her face, illuminating it as an actor's features are picked out by the spotlight on a darkened stage. Although a black lace veil was drawn across her chin and cheeks after the manner of a Western desperado's handkerchief mask, so filmy was the tissue that her countenance was alluringly shadowed rather than obscured. A beautiful face it was, but not a lovely one. Skin light and clear as any blond's was complemented by hair as black and bright as polished basalt, black brows circumflexed superciliously over eyes of almost startling blueness. Her small, petulant mouth had full, ardent lips of brilliant red.

There was a slightly amused, faintly scornful smile on her somewhat vixenish mouth, and her small teeth, gleaming like white coral behind the vivid carmine of her lips, seemed sharp as little sabers as she called to us in a rich contralto: "Good evening, gentlemen. If you're looking for some one, you'll save time and trouble by abandoning the search and going home."

The echo of a cynical, disdainful laugh floated back to us as she set speed to her car and vanished in the dark.

Jules de Grandin stared after her, his hand still half-way to the hat he had politely touched when she first addressed us. Astonishingly, he burst into a laugh. "*Tiens,* my friend," he exclaimed when he regained his breath, "it seems there are more locks than one for which we seek the keys tonight."

3. *"David Hume hys Iournal"*

ARABELLA HUME came quickly toward us as we entered the hall. Sorrow and hope—or the entreaty of hope—was in the gaze she turned on us. Also, it seemed to me, there lay deep in her eyes some latent, nameless fear, vague and indefinable as a child's dread of the dark, and as terrifying.

"Oh, Doctor Trowbridge—Doctor de Grandin—have you found out anything? Do you know anything?" she quavered. "It's all so dreadful, so—so impossible! Can you—have you any explanation?"

De Grandin bent stiffly from the hips as he took her hand in his and raised it to his lips. "Courage, *Madame,*" he exhorted. "We shall find her, never fear."

"Oh, yes, yes," she answered almost breathlessly, "she will be found. She *must* be found, with you and Doctor Trowbridge looking for her, I know it. Don't you think a mother who has been as close to her child as I have been to Alice since Ronald was killed may have a sixth sense where she is concerned? I have such a sense. I tell you—I *know*—Alice is near."

The little Frenchman regarded her somberly. "I, too, have a feeling she is not far distant," he declared. "It is as if she were near us—in an adjoining room, by example—but a room with soundproof walls and a cleverly hidden door. It is for you to help us find that door—and the key which will unlock it—Madame Hume."

"I'll do everything I can," she promised.

"Very good. You can tell us, to begin, all that you know, all you have heard, of David Hume, the founder of this family."

Arabella gave him a half-startled, half-disbelieving glance, almost as though he had requested her to state her views of the Einstein hypothesis or some similarly recondite and irrelevant matter. "I really don't know anything about him," she returned somewhat coldly. "He seems to have been a sort of Melchizedek, appearing from nowhere and without any antecedents."

"U'm?" De Grandin stroked his little, wheat-blond mustache with affectionate thoughtfulness. "There are then no records—no family records of any kind—which one can consult? No deeds or wills or leases, by example?"

"Only the family Bible, and that——"

"*Eh bien, Madame,* we may do worse than consult the Scriptures in our present difficulty. By all means, lead us to it," he broke in.

The records of ten generations of Humes were spread upon the sheets bound between the Book of Malachi and the Apocrypha. Of succeeding members of the family there was extensive register, their births, their baptisms, their progeny and deaths, as well as matrimonial alliances being catalogued with painstaking detail. Of David Hume the only entry read: "*Dyed in ye hope of gloryous Resurrection aet yrs 81, mos 7, dys 20, ye 29th Sept.* MDCLVII."

"*Nom d'un bouc,* and is this all?" De Grandin tugged so viciously at the waxed ends of his mustache that I felt sure the hairs would be wrenched loose from his lip. "Satan bake the fellow for a pusillanimous rogue! Even though he had small pride of ancestry, he should have considered future generations. He should have had a thought for my convenience, *pardieu!*"

He closed the great, cedar-bound book with a resounding bang and thrust it angrily back into the case. But as he shoved the heavy volume from him a hammered brass corner reinforcing the cover caught against the shelf edge, wrenching the tome from his hands, and the Bible fell crashing to the floor.

"Oh, *mille pardons!*" he cried contritely, stooping to retrieve the fallen book. "I did lose my temper, *Madame,* and—*Dieu de Dieu,* what have we here?"

The impact of the fall had split the brittle, age-worn cedar slabs with which the Bible had been bound, and where the wood had buckled gablewise the glazed-leather inner binding had cracked in a long, vertical fissure, and from this opening protruded a sheaf of folded paper. Even as we leaned forward to inspect it we saw that it was covered with fine, crabbed writing in all but totally faded ink.

Bearing the manuscript to the reading-table de Grandin switched on all the lights in the electrolier and bent above

the faded, time-obliterated sheets. For a moment he knit his brows in concentration; then:

"Ah-ha," he exclaimed exultantly, "ah-ha-ha, my friends, we have at last flushed old Monsieur David's secret from its covert! Come close and look, if you will be so good."

He spread the sheets upon the polished table top and tapped the uppermost with the tip of a small, well-manicured forefinger. "You see?" he asked.

Although the passage of three hundred years had dimmed the ink with which the old scribe wrote, enough remained to let us read across the yellowed paper's top: *"David Hume hys Iournal"* and below: *"Inscrybed at hys house at Twelvetrees in ye colonie of New——"*

The rest had faded out, but enough was there to tell us that some secret archive of the family had been brought to light and that the scrivener had been that mysterious ancestor of whom no more was known than that he once had lived at Twelvetrees.

"May one trespass on your hospitality for pen and paper, *Madame?*" de Grandin asked, his little, round blue eyes shining with suppressed excitement, the twin needles of his waxed mustache points twitching like the whiskers of an agitated tom-cat. "This writing is so faint it would greatly tax one to attempt reading it aloud, and by tomorrow it may be fainter with exposure to the air; but if you will give leave that I transcribe it while I yet may read, I will endeavor to prepare a copy and read you the results of my work when it is done."

Arabella Hume, scarcely less excited than we, nodded hasty assent, and de Grandin shut himself in the Ancestors' Room with pen and paper and a tray of cigarettes to perform his task.

Twice while we waited in the hall we saw the butler tiptoe into the closed room in answer to the little Frenchman's summons. His first trip was accompanied by a bowl of ice, a glass and a decanter of brandy. The second time he carried only brandy. "He'll drink himself into a stupor," Arabella told me when the second consignment of liquor was borne in.

"Not he," I assured her with a laugh. "Alcohol's only a febrifuge with him. He drinks it like water when he's working intensively, and it never seems to affect him."

"Oh?" she answered somewhat doubtfully. "Well, I hope he'll manage to stay sober till he's finished."

"Wait and see," I told her. "If he's unsteady on his feet, I'll——"

DE GRANDIN'S entrance cut my promise short. His face was flushed, his little, round blue eyes were shining as though with unshed tears, and his mustache fairly bristling with excitement and elation; but of alcoholic intoxication there was no slightest sign.

"Voyez," he ordered, flourishing a sheaf of rustling papers. "Although the writing was so faded that I did perforce miss much of the story of Monsieur the Old One, enough remained to give us information of the great importance. But yes. Your closest attention, if you please."

Seating himself on the table edge and swinging one small, patent leather shod foot in rhythm with his reading, he began:

". . . and now my case was truly worser than before, for though my Moslem captors had been followers of Mahound, these that had taken me from them were worshippers of Satan's self, and nightly bowed the knee to Beelzebub, whom they worshipped in the image of a peacock highte Melek Taos, whose favor they are wont to invoke with every sort of wickedness. For their black scriptures teach that God is good and merciful, and

slow to take offense, while Shaitan, as they name the Devil, is ever near and ever watchful to do hurt to mankind, wherefore he must be propitiated by all who would not feel his malice. And so they work all manner of evil, accounting that as virtue which would be deemed most villainous by us, and confessing and repenting of good acts as though they were the deadliest of sins.

"Their chief priest is yclept the Mir, and of all their wicked tribe he is the wickedest, scrupling not at murder and finding great delight in such vile acts as caused the Lord aforetimes to rain down fire and brimstone on the evil cities of the plain.

"Once as I stood without their temple gate by night I did espy a great procession entering with the light of torches and with every sound of minstrels and mirth, but in the middle of the revelers there walked a group of maidens, and these did weep continually. And when I asked the meaning of this sight they told me that these girls, the very flower of the tribe, had been selected by the Mir for his delight and for the lust and cruelty of those who acted as his counsellors, for such is their religion that the pontifex may choose from out their womanhood as many as he pleases, and do unto them even according to the dictates of his evil will, nor may any say him nay. And as I looked upon these woful women I beheld that each was clasped about the middle by a stomacher of cunningly wrought silver, and this, they told me, was the girdle of a bride, for their women don such girdles when they are ready to engage in wedlock, or when they tread the path of sorrow which leads them to the Mir and degradation. For he who gives his daughter voluntarily to be devoured by the Mir acquires merit in the eyes of Satan, and to lie as paramour to the Devil's viceroy on earth is accounted honorable for any woman, yea, even greater than to enter into matrimony."

The little Frenchman laid his paper down and turned his quick, bird-like glance upon us. "Is it not clear?" he asked. "This old Monsieur David was undoubtlessly sold as slave unto the Yezidees by Moslems who had in some way captured him. It is of Sheik-Adi, the sacred city of the Satanists, he writes, and his reference to the silver girdles of the brides is most illuminating. *N'est-ce-pas?* Consider what he has to say a little later."

Shuffling through the pile of manuscript, he selected a fresh sheet and resumed:

"Yet she, who was the daughter of this man of blood and sin, was fair and good as any Christian maid. Moreover, her heart was inclined toward me, and many a kind act she did for me, the Christian slave, who sadly lacked for kindness in that evil mountain city. And so, as it has ever been 'twixt man and maid, we loved, and loving knew that we could not be happy till our fates were joined forever. And so it was arranged that we should fly to freedom in the south, where I could take her to wife, for she had agreed to renounce Satan and all his ways to follow in the pathway of the true religion.

"Now, in the falling of the year, when crops were gathered and the husbandry was through, these people were wont to gather in their temple of the peacock and make a feast wherewith they praised the power of evil, and on the altar would be offered beasts, birds and women devoted to the service of the arch-fiend. And thus did Kudejah and I arrange the manner of our flight:

"When all within the temple was prepared and we could hear the sound of drums and trumpets offering praise unto the Devil, we slipped quickly down the mountain pass, she closely veiled like any

Moslem woman, I disguised as a man of Kurdistan, and with us were two mules well laden with gold and jewels of precious stones which she had filched from the treasury of the Mir her sire. Nor did we loiter on the way, but hastened ever till we came to the border of the land of evil and were safe among the Moslems, who treated us right kindly, believing us their co-religionists who were fleeing from the worshippers of Satan. And so we came at last to Busra, and thence by ship to Muskat, from whence we sailed again and finally came once more to England.

"But ere we breathed the English air again we had been wed with Christian rite; and Kudejah had dropped her heathen name and taken that of Mary, which had also been my mother's. And sure a sweeter bride or truer wife has no man ever had, e'en though she saw the light of day beneath the shadow of the Devil's temple. Yet, though she had accepted Christ and put behind her Lucifer and all his works, when we did stand before the parson to be wed my Mary wore about her the great silver belt which had been fashioned for her marriage when she dwelt on Satan's mountain, and this we have unto this day as a marriage portion for the women of our house.

"Most crafty are those devil men from whom we fled, and well were we aware of it, and so we came to this new land, where I did leave my olden name behind and take the name of Hume, that those who might come seeking us might the better be befooled; and yet, though leagues of ocean toss between us and the worshippers of Satan, a thought still plagues us as a naughty dream may vex a frightened child. The office of high priest to Melek Taos is hereditary in the family of the Mir. The eldest son ascends the altar to perform the rites of blood the moment that his sire has breathed his last, and if there be no son, then must the eldest daughter of the line be wedded unto Satan with formal ceremony and silver girdle, and serve as priestess in her father's stead until a son is born, whereupon she is led forth with all solemnity and put to death with horrid torment, for her sufferings are a libation unto Beelzebub. And thereupon a regency of under-priests must serve the King of Evil till the son is grown to man's estate.

"Wherefore, O ye who may come after me in this the family I have founded, I do adjure ye to make choice of death rather than submit unto the demands of the worshippers of Satan, for in the years to come it well may hap that the Mir his line may be exhausted, and then those crafty men of magic who do dwell on Mount Lalesh may seek ye out and summon ye to serve the altar of the Devil. And so I warn ye, if the time should come when ye receive a message from ye know not where, bidding ye simply to come home, that this shall be the sign, and straightway shall ye flee with utmost haste, or if ye can not flee, then take your life with your own hand, for better far is it to face an outraged God with the bloodstains of self-murder on your hands than to stand before the Seat of Judgment with your soul foredoomed for that ye were a priest and server of the Arch-Fiend in your days on earth.

"I have——"

"Well?" I prompted as the silence lengthened. "What else?"

"There is no 'else,' my friend," he answered. "As I told you, the ink with which *Monsieur l'Ancêtre* wrote was faded as an old belle's charms; the remainder of his message is but the shadow of a shadow, an angel out of Paradise could not decipher it."

We sat in silence for a moment, and it was Arabella Hume who framed our common thought in words: "He said, 'if the

time should come when ye receive a message from ye know not where, bidding ye simply to come home, this shall be the sign'—the message Alice got on the ouija board today—you remember? You saw it repeated yourselves before we went to church!"

De Grandin bent a fixed, unwinking stare on her. *"Madame,"* he asked, "can you not give us some description of the stranger who desired that you let him see the wedding girdle of Madame David? Was he, according to your guess, a Levantin?"

Mrs. Hume considered him a moment thoughtfully. Then: "No-o, I shouldn't think so," she replied. "He seemed more like a Spaniard, possibly Italian, though it's hard to say more than that he was dark and very clean-looking and spoke English with that perfect lack of accent which showed it was not his mother tongue. You know—each word sharply defined, as though it might be the result of a mental translation."

"Perfectly," de Grandin nodded. "I should say——"

"Well, *I* should say it's all a lot of nonsense," I broke in. "It may be true old David Hume was sold as a slave to these Devil-Worshippers, and that he ran off with the high priest's daughter—and all the money he could get his hands on. But you know how superstitious people were in those days. The chances are he was filled full of fantastic stories by the Yezidees, and believed everything he heard and more that he imagined. I'd say his conscience was troubling him toward the last; perhaps his mind was failing, too. Look how carefully he hid what he'd written in the cover of the family Bible. Is that the action of a normal man, especially if he seriously intended future generations to profit by his warning?"

Arabella glanced at each of us in turn, finally gave vent to a sigh of relief and put her hand on mine. "Thank you, Samuel," she said. "I knew there was some explanation for it all; but Alice's strange disappearance and all this has so upset me that I'm hardly normal." To de Grandin she added:

"I'm sure Doctor Trowbridge's explanation is the right one. Old David must have been weak-minded when he wrote that senseless warning. He was eighty-one when he died, and you know how old people are inclined to imagine things. Like children, really."

A stubborn, argumentative expression crossed de Grandin's face, but gave place instantly to one of his quick, elfin grins. "Perhaps I have put too much trust in the vaporings of a senile old man's broken mind," he admitted. "Nevertheless, the fact remains that Mademoiselle Alice is not here, and the task remains for us to find her. Come, Friend Trowbridge, there is little we can do here and much we can do elsewhere. Let us go, if we have *Madame's* permission to retire." He bowed with Continental grace to Arabella.

"Oh, yes; and thank you so much for what you've done already," Mrs. Hume returned. "I'm half inclined to think this is some madcap prank of Alice's, but"—her expression of false confidence gave way a moment, unmasking the panic fear which gnawed at her hear—"if we hear nothing further by morning, I think we'd better summon the police, don't you?"

"By all means," he agreed, taking her hand in his and bending ceremoniously above it ere he turned to accompany me from the house.

"THANK you, my friend," he murmured as we began our homeward drive. "Your interruption was most timely and served to divert poor *Madame's*

mind from the awful horror I saw gathering round us."

"Eh?" I returned. "You don't mean to tell me you actually believe that balderdash you read us?"

He turned on me in blank amazement. "And was your avowal of disbelief in Monsieur David's tale not simulated?" he asked.

"Good Lord," I answered in disgust, "d'ye mean to say you swallowed that old dotard's story—all that nonsense about an hereditary priesthood of the Devil-Worshippers, and the possibility of—— See here, don't you remember he said if the Mir's male line became extinct the eldest daughter had to serve, and that she must be married to the Devil? That might be possible—mystically speaking—but he specifically said she shall thereafter act as high priestess until a son is born. I know the legend of Robert the Devil, and it was probably implicitly believed in David Hume's day, for the Devil was a very real person then, but we've rather graduated from that sort of mediævalism nowadays. How can a woman be married to the Devil, and bear him a son?"

There was more of sneer than smile in the mirthless grin he turned on me. "Have you been to India?" he demanded.

"India? Of course not, but what's that got to do with——"

"Then perhaps it is that you do not know of the *deva-dasis*, or wives of Siva. In that benighted land a father thinks he does acquire merit by giving up his daughter to be wedded to the god, and wedded to him she truly is, with all the formal pomp accompanying the espousal of a princess. Thereafter she is accounted honorable as consort of the great God of Destruction — but though her wedded lord is but a thing of carven stone she does not lack for offspring. No, *pardieu*, she is more often than not a mother before her thirteenth birthday, and several times a mother when her twentieth year is reached—if she survives that long.

"Consider the analogy here. From what I have beheld with my own two eyes —and my sight is very keen—and from what I have been told by witnesses who had no need to lie or even stretch the truth, I know that Monsieur David's narrative is based on fact, and very ugly fact, at that."

"But what about his hiding his 'warning' in the cover of the Bible?" I persisted. "Surely——"

"Three centuries have passed since he penned those words," de Grandin interrupted, "and in that time much may be forgotten. That David told his children where they might look for guidance if the need for guidance rose I make no doubt. But in the course of time his admonition was forgotten, or——"

He broke off musingly, and I had to prompt him:

"Yes? Or——?"

"Or the story of some secret warning *has* been handed down to each generation," he replied. "Did not it strike you more than once that Madame Hume was not entirely honest—pardon, I should say frank—with us? The fear of something which she could or would not mention was plainly in her eyes when we came from the church, and earlier in the evening her efforts to direct the conversation from that obscure message which her daughter had from the ouija board were far more resolute than they would have been had she had nothing but a distaste for superstitious practise to excuse them. Also, when we did ask for information relative to Monsieur David she suddenly turned cold to us, and had I not persisted would undoubtlessly have turned us from examination of the family Bible. Moreover——"

Again he paused and again I prompted him.

"Jules de Grandin is experienced," he assured me solemnly. "As a member of *la Sûreté* he has had much to do with questioned documents. He knows ink, he knows paper, he can scent a forgery or an attempt at alteration as far as he can recognize the symptoms of coryza. Yes."

"Yes? What then?"

"This, *cordieu!* I played the dolt, the simple, guileless fool, tonight, my friend, but this I saw with half an eye as I made transcription of old David's story: Some one—I know not who—*some one has essayed to blot that writing out with acid ink eradicator.* Had the writing been in modern metallic ink the effort would have been successful, but *Monsieur l'Ancêtre* wrote with the old vegetable ink of his time, and so the acid did not quite efface it. It is that to which I owed my ability to read the journal. But believe me, good friend, it was a man—or woman—and not time, which dimmed the writing on those pages and rendered illegible much which old David wrote to warn his descendants, and which would have greatly simplified our problems."

"But who could have done it—and why?" I asked.

He raised his narrow shoulders in an irritable shrug. "Ask the good God—or perhaps the Devil—as to that," he told me. "They know the answer; not I."

4. *By Whose Hand?*

THREATENING little flurries of snow had been skirmishing down from the cloud-veiled sky all evening; before we were half-way to my house the storm attacked in force, great feathery flakes following each other in smothering profusion, obscuring traffic lights, clinging to the windshield, clogging our wheels. Midnight was well past as we stamped up my front steps, brushed our feet on the doormat and paused a moment at the vestibule while I fumbled for my latch-key. As I swung back the door the office 'phone began a shrill, hysterical cachinnation which seemed to rise in terrified crescendo as I ran down the hall.

"Hullo?" I challenged gruffly.

"Doctor Trowbridge?" the high-pitched voice across the wire called.

"Yes; what——"

"This is Wilbur, sir. Mrs. Hume's butler, you know."

"Oh? Well, what's——"

"It's the missis, sir; she's—I'm afraid you'll be too late, sir; but please hurry. I just found her, an' she's——" His voice trailed off in a wheeze of asthmatic excitement, and I could hear him gasping in a futile effort to regain his speech.

"Oh, all right; do what you can for her till we get there; we'll be right over," I called back. Attempting to ascertain the nature of the illness by questioning the inarticulate domestic would be only a waste of time, I saw, and obviously time was precious.

"Come on," I bade de Grandin. "Something's happened to Arabella Hume; Wilbur is so frightened he's gasping like a newly landed fish and can't give any information; so it may be anything from a broken arm to a stroke of apoplexy, but——"

"But certainly, by all means, of course," the Frenchman agreed enthusiastically. Next to solving a perplexing bit of crime he dearly loved a medical emergency. With deftness which combined uncanny speed with almost superhuman accuracy of selection he bundled bandages and styptics, stimulants and sedatives, a sphygmomanometer and a kit of first-aid instruments into a bag, then: "Let us go," he urged. "All is ready."

Wilbur was pacing back and forth on

the veranda when we arrived some half an hour later. His face was blue with cold, and his teeth chattered so he could scarcely form the hurried greeting which he gave us.

"Gawd, gentlemen," he told us tremblingly, "I thought you'd never get here!"

"*Eh bien*, so did we," de Grandin answered. "*Madame* your mistress, where is she, if you please?"

"Upstairs, sir, in her dressing-room. I found her like she is just before I called you. I'd finished lockin' up the house an' was going' to my room by way o' the back stairs when I heard the sound o' something heavy falling up the hall toward the front o' the house, an' ran to see if I was wanted. She didn't hanswer when I knocked—indeed, it seemed so *hawful* quiet in 'er room that it fair gave me the creeps, sir. So I made bold to knock again; then, when she didn't hanswer, to look in, an'——"

"Lead on, *mon vieux*," de Grandin interrupted. "The circumstances of your discovery can wait, at present. It is Madame Hume that we would see."

The butler was a step or two ahead of us as we climbed the stairs, but as we approached Mrs. Hume's door his footsteps lagged. By the time we stood before the portal he had dropped back to de Grandin's elbow, and made no motion either to rap upon the panels or to turn the knob for us.

"Lead on," de Grandin repeated. "We would see her at once, if you please."

"There's nothing you can do, of course," the servant answered, "but in a cyse like this it's best to have a doctor, so——"

The little Frenchman's temper broke beneath the strain. "Damn yes!" he snapped, "but save your conversation till a later time, my friend. I do not care for it at present."

Without more ado he turned the latch and swung the door back, stepping quickly past the butler into Arabella's boudoir, but coming to a halt on the threshold.

Close behind him, I stepped forward, but stopped with a gasp at what I saw.

Suspended by a heavy silken curtain cord looped twice about her neck, Arabella Hume hung from the iron curtain rod bridging the archway between her chamber and her dressing-room. A satin-upholstered boudoir-chair lay overturned on its back beneath her and a little to one side, her flaccid feet in their satin evening slippers swung a scant four inches from the floor, her hands draped limply at her sides, and her head was sharply bent forward to the left. Her lips were slightly parted and between them showed a quarter-inch of tongue, like the pale-pink pistil of a blossom protruding from the leaves. Her eyes were partly opened, and already covered with the shining gelatin-film of death, but not at all protuberant.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"My Gawd, sir, ain't it *hawful?*" whispered Wilbur.

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu; c'est une affaire du diable!*" said Jules de Grandin.

To Wilbur: "You say you first discovered her thus when you called Doctor Trowbridge?" he demanded.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Then why in the name of ten million small blue devils did you not cut her down? The chances are she was already dead, but——"

"You daren't cut a 'angin' person down till the coroner's looked at 'im, dast you, sir?" the servant replied.

"*Ohé; sacré nom d'un petit bonhomme!*" De Grandin wrenched savagely at the ends of his mustache. "This chimney-corner law; this smug wisdom of ignorance—it will drive me mad. Had you cut the cord by which she hung when you

first saw her, it is possible there would have been no need to call the coroner at all, great stupid-head!" he stormed.

Abruptly he put his anger by as one might lay off a garment. "No matter," he resumed, "the mischief is now done. We must to work. Wilbur, bring me a decanter full—*full,* remember—of brandy."

"Yes, sir," the servant answered. "Thank you, sir."

"And, Wilbur——"

"Yes, sir?"

"Take a drink—or two—yourself before you serve me."

"Thank *you,* sir!" The butler departed on his errand with alacrity.

"Quick, my friend," the Frenchman ordered, "we must examine her before he returns."

Snipping through the silken strangling cord with a pair of surgeon's scissors he eased the body down in his arms and bore it to the couch, then with infinite care loosened the ligature about the throat and slipped the noose over her head. *"Morbleu,"* he murmured as he laid the cord upon the table, "who taught her to form a hangman's knot, one wonders?"

I took the curtain cord in my hand and looked at it. He was right. The loop which had been round Arabella's neck was no ordinary slip-knot, but a carefully fashioned hangman's halter, several turns of end being taken round the cord above the noose, thus insuring greater freedom for the loop to tighten around the throat.

"It may be so," I heard him whisper to himself, "but I damn doubt it."

"What's that?" I asked.

He bent above the body, examining the throat first with his naked eye, then through a small but powerful lens which he drew from his waistcoat pocket.

"Consider," he replied, rising from his task to regard me with a fixed, unwinking stare. "Wilbur tells us that he heard a piece of furniture overturned. That would be the chair on which this poor one stood. Immediately afterward he ran to her room and knocked. Receiving no response, he knocked again; then, when no answer was forthcoming, he entered. With due allowance made for everything, not more than five minutes could have elapsed. Yet she was dead. I do not like it."

"She might not have been dead when he first saw her," I returned. "You know how quickly unconsciousness follows strangulation. She might have been unconscious and Wilbur assumed she was dead; then because of his fool notion that it was unlawful to cut a hanging body down, he left her strangling here while he ran to 'phone us and waited for us on the porch."

The little Frenchman nodded shortly. "How is death caused in hanging?" he demanded.

"Why—er—by strangulation—asphyxia—or fracture of the cervical vertebræ and rupture of the spinal cord."

"Précisément. If Madame Hume had choked to death from yonder bar is it not nearly certain that not only her poor tongue, but her eyes, as well, would have been forced forward by pressure on the constricted blood vessels?"

"I suppose so, but——"

"The devil take all buts. See here——"

Drawing me forward he thrust his lens into my hand and pointed to the dead woman's throat. "Look carefully," he ordered. "You will observe the double track made by the wide silk noose with which poor Madame Hume was hanged."

"Yes," I nodded as my eye followed the parallel anemic band marked by the curtain cord. "I see it."

"Very good. Now look more closely—see, hold the glass so—and tell me if you see a third—a so narrow and deeper mark, a spiral track traced in slightly pur-

ple bruise beneath the wide, white marks made by the curtain cord?"

"By heaven!" I started as his slender finger pointed to the darker, deeper depression. "It's pretty faint, but still perceptible. I wonder what that means?"

"Murder, *pardieu!*" he spat the accusation viciously. "Hanged poor Madame Arabella undoubtlessly was, but *hanged after she was dead.*

"This so narrow, purple mark, I know him. Ha, do I not, *cordieu?* In the native states of India I have seen him more than once, and never can it be mistaken for other than itself. No. It is the mark of the *roomal* of the *thugs;* the strangling-cord of those who serve Bhowanee the Black Goddess. Scarcely thicker than a harp-string it is, yet deadly as a serpent's fang. See, those evil ones loop it quickly round their victim's neck, draw it tight with crossed ends, then with their knuckles knead sharply at the base of the skull where the atlas lies and, *pouf!* It is done. Yes. Certainly.

"You want more proof?" He rose and faced me with flashing eyes, his little, milk-white teeth bare beneath the line of his mustache. "Then look——" Abruptly he took Arabella's cheeks between his palms and drew her head forward, then rocked it sharply from side to side.

The evidence was indisputable. Such limber, limp flaccidity meant but one thing. The woman's neck was broken.

"But the drop," I persisted. "She might have broken her neck when she kicked the chair from under her, and——"

"Ah bah!" he countered hotly. "That chair-seat is a scant half-meter high, her feet swung at least four inches from the floor; she could not possibly have dropped a greater length than sixteen inches. Her weight was negligible—I lifted her a moment since—not more than ninety-five or ninety-eight pounds, at most. A drop so short for such a light woman could not possibly have broken the spine. Besides, this fracture is high, not lower than the atlas or the axis; the ligature about her neck encompassed the second cervical vertebra. The two things do not match. *Non,* my friend, this is no suicide, but murder cleverly dressed to simulate it."

"Your brandy, sir." Wilbur halted at the door, keeping his eyes averted resolutely from the quiet form upon the couch.

"Merci bien," de Grandin answered. "Put it down, *mon vieux;* then call *Monsieur* the Coroner and tell him we await him. If the other servants have not yet been apprised of *Madame's* death it will do no harm to let them wait till morning."

"Poor Arabella!" I murmured, staring with tear-dimmed eyes at the pathetic little body underneath the coverlet. "Who could have wanted to kill her?"

"Eh bien, who could have wanted to steal Mademoiselle Alice away? Who wanted to obtain the Devil-Worshippers' marriage belt? Who sent the strange veiled lady following after us to tell us that our quest was vain?" he answered, bitter mockery in his tones.

"Good heavens, you mean——"

"Precisely, exactly; quite so. I mean no more and certainly no less, my friend. This is assuredly the Devil's business, and right well have his servants done it. Certainly."

JOHN MARTIN, county coroner and leading mortician of the city, and Jules de Grandin were firm friends. At the little Frenchman's earnest entreaty he drove Parnell, the coroner's physician, to perform an autopsy which corroborated every assumption de Grandin had made. Death was due to coma induced by rupture of the myelon, not to strangulation, the post-mortem revealed. Moreover, though Parnell rebelled at the suggestion, Robert

Hartley, chief bio-chemist at Mercy Hospital, was called in to make a decimetric test of Arabella's liver. Carefully, de Grandin, Martin and I watching him, he macerated a bit of the organ, mixed it with lampblack and strained it through a porcelain filter. While Parnell sulked in a corner of the laboratory the rest of us watched breathlessly as the serous liquid settled in the glass dish beneath the filter. It was clear.

"Well, that's that," said Hartley.

"Mais oui, c'est démontré," de Grandin nodded.

"Umpf!" Parnell grunted in disgust.

The ruddy-faced, gray-haired coroner looked interrogatively from one to the other. "Just what's been proved, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Absence of glycogen," Hartley answered.

"Murder, *parbleu!"* de Grandin added.

"Nothing—nothing at all," Parnell assured him.

"But——" the coroner began, more bewildered than ever.

"Monsieur," de Grandin cut him short, "glycogen, or liver-sugar, represents the stored-up energy of muscular strength in the machines we call our bodies. When it is plentiful we are strong, active, hearty —what you call filled with the pep. As it is depleted we become weakened. When it is gone we are exhausted. Yes.

"Undoubtlessly a woman being strangled would make a tremendous last muscular effort to fight off her assailant. Such an effort, lasting but a little minute, would burn this muscle-power we call glycogen from her liver. Her reservoir of strength would be drained.

"Am I not right?" he turned for confirmation to Hartley, who nodded slow agreement.

"Very well, then. Now, the experiment Doctor Hartley has just performed shows us conclusively that glycogen was practically absent from Madame Hume's liver. Had it been present in even small quantities the filtered liquid would have been cloudy. Yes. But it was clear, or very nearly so, as you did observe with your own two eyes. What then?

"Simply this, *mordieu:* She fought—frenziedly, though futilely—for her life before the vile miscreant who killed her drew his *roomal* tight about her throat and with his diabolically skilful knuckles broke her neck. It was the tightening strangling-cord which prevented outcry, though the chair we found overturned was undoubtlessly turned over in the struggle, not kicked aside by her after she had adjusted the hangman's noose about her neck. No; by no means. Had she been self-hanged there would be ample store of glycogen found in her liver; as it is——" he paused, raising shoulders, elbows and eyebrows in a shrug of matchless eloquence.

"I—see," said Mr. Martin slowly.

But the jury did not. Doctor Parnell's lukewarm reception of de Grandin's theory, Hartley's refusal to testify to anything save that there was a lack of glycogen found in the liver, and the cleverness with which the stage had been set to give plausibility to suspicion of suicide combined to forge a chain of circumstantial evidence which all the little Frenchman's fiery oratory could not break. Suicide—dead by her own hand while of unsound mind, was the consensus of the jury.

5. *The Missing Child*

HEADLINES screamed across the country: "Mother Slays Self as Cops Hunt Vanished Child"—"Broken Heart Makes Mother Seek Death"—"Love-Crazed Woman Suicides as Daughter Disappears"—these were among the more conservative statements which faced Americans from Maine to Oregon as they

sat at breakfast, and for a time reporters from the metropolitan dailies were as thick in our town as hungry flies around an abattoir. At length the hue and cry died down, and Arabella's death and Alice's strange disappearance gave way on the front page to the latest tales of scandal in municipal administration.

Jules de Grandin shut himself in the study, emerging only at mealtime or after office hours for a chat with me, smoked innumerable vile-smelling French cigarettes, used the telephone a great deal and posted many letters; but as far as I could see, his efforts to find Alice or run down her mother's murderers were nil.

"I should think you'd feel better if you went out a bit," I told him at breakfast one day. "I know finding Alice is a hopeless task, and as for Arabella's murderer —I'm beginning to think she committed suicide, after all, but——"

He looked up from the copy of the *Morning Journal* he had been perusing and fixed me with a straight, unwinking stare. "The police are co-operating," he answered shortly. "Not a railway station or bus terminal lacks watchers, and no private cars or taxis leave the city limits without submitting to a secret but thorough inspection. What more can we do?"

"Why, you might direct the search personally, or check up such few clues as they may find——" I began, nettled by his loss of interest in the case, but he cut me short with a quick motion of his hand.

"My friend," he told me with one of his Puckish grins, "attend me. When I was a little lad I had a dog, a silly, energetic little fellow, all barks and jumps and wagging tail. He dearly loved a cat. *Morbleu,* the very sight of Madame Puss would put him in a frenzy! How he would rush at her, how he would show his teeth and growl and put on the fierce face! Then, when she had retired to the safety of a pear tree, how he would stand beneath her refuge and twitch his tail and bark! *Cordieu,* sometimes I would think he must surely burst with barking!

"And she, the scornful pussy, did she object? *Mille fois non.* Safe in her sanctuary she would eye him languidly, and let him bark. At last, when he had barked himself into exhaustion, he would withdraw to think upon the evils of the times, and Madame Puss would leisurely descend the tree and trot away to safety.

"I would often say to him: 'My Toto, you are a great stupid-head. Why do you do it? Why do you not depart a little distance from the tree and lie *perdu?* Then Madame Puss may think that you have lost all interest and come down; then *pouf!* you have her at your mercy.' But no, that foolish little dog, he would not listen to advice, and so, though he expended great energy and made a most impressive noise, he never caught a cat.

"Friend Trowbridge, I am not a foolish little dog. By no means. It is not I who do such things. Here in the house I stay, with strict instructions that I be not called should any want me on the telephone; I am not ever seen abroad. For all of the display I make, I might be dead or gone away. But I am neither. Always and ever I sit here all watchful, and frequently I do call the gendarmes to find if they have discovered that for which we seek. I know—I see all that takes place. If any makes a move, I know it. But those we seek do not know I know. No, they think Jules de Grandin is asleep or drunk, or perhaps gone away. It is best so, I assure you. Anon, emboldened by my seeming lethargy, they will emerge from out their hiding-place; then——" His smile became unpleasant as he clenched one slender, strong hand with a gesture suggestive of crushing something soft within it. "Then, *pardieu,* they shall learn that Jules de Grandin is not a fool, nor can they make the long nose at him

with impunity!" He helped himself to a second portion of broiled mackerel from the hot-water dish and resumed his perusal of the *Journal*. Suddenly:

"*Ohé, misère, calamité; c'est désastreux!*" he cried. "Read here, my friend, if you please. Read it and tell me that I am mistaken!"

Hands shaking with eagerness, he passed the paper to me, indicating a rather inconspicuous item in the lower left-hand corner of the third page.

CHILD VANISHES FROM BAPTIST HOME

the headline stated. Then:

Shortly after one o'clock this morning Mrs. Maude Gordon, 47, a matron in the Harrisonville Baptist Home, was awakened by sounds of crying from the ward in which the younger children of the orphanage were quartered. Going quickly to the room the woman found some of the older children sitting up in bed and crying bitterly. Upon demanding what was wrong she was informed that a man had just been in the place, flashed a flashlight in several of the children's faces, then picked Charles Eastman, eight months, from his crib which stood near the open window, and made off with him.

The matron at once gave the alarm, and a thorough search of the premises was made, but no trace of the missing child or his abductor could be found. The gates of the orphanage were shut and locked, and the lodgekeeper, who was awakened by the searching party, declared it would have been impossible for any one to pass in or out without his knowledge, as his were the only keys to the gates besides those in the main office of the home, and the keys were in their accustomed place on his bureau in his bedroom when the alarm reached him. The home's extensive grounds are surrounded by a twelve-foot brick wall, with an overhand on either side, and climbing it either from the outside or from within would be almost impossible without extension ladders.

The Eastman child's parents are dead and his only living relative so far as known is an uncle, lately released from the penitentiary. Police are checking up on this man's movements during the night, as it is thought he may have stolen the child to satisfy a grudge he had against the mother, now dead, whose testimony helped convict him on a charge of burglary five years ago.

"Well?" I asked as I laid the paper down. "Is that what you read?"

"*Hélas*, yes. It is too true!"

"Why, what d'ye mean——" I began, but he cut in hurriedly.

"Perhaps I do mistake, my friend. Although I have lived in your so splendid country for upward of five years, there is still much which is strange to me. Is it that the sect you call the Baptists do not believe in infant baptism—that only those of riper years are given baptism by them?"

"Yes, that's so," I answered. "They hold that——"

"No matter what they hold, if that be so," he interrupted. "That this little one had not been accorded baptism is enough —*parbleu*, it is too much. Come, my friend, the time for concealing is past. Let us hasten, let us rush; let us fly!"

"Rush?" I echoed, bewildered. "Where?"

"To that orphan home of the so little unbaptized Baptists, of course," he answered almost furiously. "Come, let us go right away, immediately, at once."

Trowbridge and de Grandin have a second encounter with the strange woman who warned them to abandon the search for Alice Hume. The terrible fate that befell the mystery woman is related in the next issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale February 1st

"They seemed to personify Age, Night and Silence."

Night and Silence

By MAURICE LEVEL

A new, brief tale of shuddery horror, by a French master of the weird story

THEY were old, crippled, horrible. The woman hobbled about on two crutches; one of the men, blind, walked with his eyes shut, his hands outstretched, his fingers spread open; the other, a deaf-mute, followed with his head lowered, rarely raising the sad, restless eyes that were the only sign of life in his impassive face.

It was said that they were two brothers and a sister, and that they were united by a savage affection. One was never seen without the other; at the church doors they shrank back into the shadows, keeping away from those professional beggars who stand boldly in the full light so that passers-by may be ashamed to ignore their importunacy. They did not ask for anything. Their appearance alone was a prayer for help. As they moved silently through the narrow, gloomy streets, a mysterious trio, they seemed to personify Age, Night and Silence.

One evening, in their hovel near the gates of the city, the woman died peacefully in their arms, without a cry, with just one long look of distress which the deaf-mute saw, and one violent shudder which the blind man felt because her hand clasped his wrist. Without a sound she passed into eternal silence.

Next day, for the first time, the two men were seen without her. They dragged about all day without even stopping at the baker's shop where they usually received doles of bread. Toward dusk, when lights began to twinkle at the dark crossroads, when the reflection of lamps

gave the houses the appearance of a smile, they bought with the few halfpence they had received two poor little candles, and they returned to the desolate hovel where the old sister lay on her pallet with no one to watch or pray for her.

They kissed the dead woman. The man came to put her in her coffin. The deal boards were fastened down and the coffin was placed on two wooden trestles; then, once more alone, the two brothers laid a sprig of boxwood on a plate, lighted their candles, and sat down for the last all-too-short vigil.

Outside, the cold wind played round the joints of the ill-fitting door. Inside, the small trembling flames barely broke the darkness with their yellow light. . . . Not a sound. . . .

For a long time they remained like this, praying, remembering, meditating. . . .

Tired out with weeping, at last they fell asleep.

When they woke it was still night. The lights of the candles still glimmered, but they were lower. The cold that is the precursor of dawn made them shiver. But there was something else—what was it? They leaned forward, the one trying to see, the other to hear. For some time they remained motionless; then, there being no repetition of what had roused them, they lay down again and began to pray.

Suddenly, for the second time, they sat up. Had either of them been alone, he would have thought himself the plaything of some fugitive hallucination. When one sees without hearing, or hears without seeing, illusion is easily created. But something abnormal was taking place; there could be no doubt about it since both were affected, since it appealed both to eyes and ears at the same time; they were fully conscious of this, but were unable to understand.

Between them they had the power of complete comprehension. Singly, each had but a partial, agonizing conception.

The deaf-mute got up and walked about. Forgetting his brother's infirmity, the blind man asked in a voice choked with fear:

"What is it? What's the matter? Why have you got up?"

He heard him moving, coming and going, stopping, starting off again, and again stopping; and having nothing but these sounds to guide his reason, his terror increased till his teeth began to chatter. He was on the point of speaking again, but remembered, and relapsed into a muttering:

"What can he see? What is it?"

The deaf-mute took a few more steps, rubbed his eyes, and presumably reassured, went back to his mattress and fell asleep.

The blind man heaved a sigh of relief, and silence fell once more, broken only by the prayers he mumbled in a monotonous undertone, his soul benumbed by grief as he waited till sleep should come and pour light into his darkness.

He was almost sleeping when the murmurs which had before made him tremble, wrenched him from an uneasy doze.

It sounded like a soft scratching mingled with light blows on a plank, curious rubbings, and stifled moans.

He leaped up. The deaf-mute had not moved. Feeling that the fear that culminates in panic was threatening him, he strove to reason with himself:

"Why should this noise terrify me? . . . The night is always full of sounds. . . . My brother is moving uneasily in his sleep . . . yes, that's it. . . . Just now I heard him walking up and down, and there was the same noise. . . . It must have been the wind. . . . But I know the sound of the wind, and it has never been like that . . . it was a noise I had never

heard. . . . What could it have been? No . . . it could not be. . . ."

He bit his fists. An awful suspicion had come to him.

"Suppose . . . no, it's not possible. . . . Suppose it was . . . there it is again! . . . Again . . . louder and louder . . . some one is scratching, scratching, knocking. . . . My God! A voice . . . her voice! She is calling! She is crying! Help, help!"

He threw himself out of bed and roared:

"François! . . . quick! . . . Help! . . . Look! . . ."

He was half mad with fear. He tore wildly at his hair, shouting:

"Look! . . . You've got eyes, you, you can see! . . ."

The moans became louder, the raps firmer. Feeling his way, stumbling against the walls, knocking against the packing-cases which served as furniture, tripping in the holes in the floor, he staggered about trying to find his sleeping brother.

He fell and got up again, bruised, covered with blood, sobbing:

"I have no eyes! I have no eyes!"

He had upset the plate on which lay the sprig of box, and the sound of the earthenware breaking on the floor gave the finishing touch to his panic.

"Help! What have I done? Help!"

The noises grew louder and more terrifying, and as an agonized cry sounded, his last doubts left him. Behind his empty eyes, he imagined he saw the horrible thing. . . .

He saw the old sister beating against the tightly-closed lid of her coffin. He saw her superhuman terror, her agony, a thousand times worse than that of any other death. . . . She was there, alive, yes alive, a few steps away from him . . . but where? She heard his steps, his voice, and he, blind, could do nothing to help her.

Where was his brother? Flinging his arms from right to left, he knocked over the candles: the wax flowed over his fingers, hot, like blood. The noise grew louder, more despairing; the voice was speaking, saying words that died away in smothered groans. . . .

"Courage!" he shrieked. "I'm here! I'm coming!"

He was now crawling along on his knees, and a sudden turn flung him against a bed; he thrust out his arms, felt a body, seized it by the shoulders and shook it with all the strength that remained in him.

Violently awakened, the deaf-mute sprang up uttering horrible cries and trying to see, but now that the candles were out, he, too, was plunged into night, the impenetrable darkness that held more terror for him than for the blind man. Stupefied with sleep, he groped about wildly with his hands, which closed in a vise-like grip on his brother's throat, stifling cries of:

"Look! Look!"

They rolled together on the floor, upsetting all that came in their way, knotted together, ferociously tearing each other with tooth and nail. In a very short time their hoarse breathing had died away. The voice, so distant and yet so near, was cut short by a spasm . . . there was a cracking noise . . . the imprisoned body was raising itself in one last supreme effort for freedom . . . a grinding noise . . . sobs . . . again the grinding noise . . . silence. . . .

Outside, the trees shuddered as they bowed in the gale; the rain beat against the walls. The late winter's dawn was still crouching on the edge of the horizon. Inside the walls of the hovel, not a sound, not a breath.

Night and Silence.

The Three From the Tomb

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A thrill-tale of surgery—three millionaires, dead and buried for months, reappear in the world of the living

"HOWARD CLAY returned? It's impossible—Howard Clay has been dead for six months!"

Peter Todd, county detective of the Castletown district, almost shouted the words into the telephone. Jerry Farley, the young reporter who had been lounging in Todd's office, sprang to the detective's side. He heard a woman's excited voice from the receiver.

"We'll be there in ten minutes, Mrs. Clay!" Todd answered. He slammed the receiver down and turned to the reporter.

"There's a story for you, Farley! Howard Clay has been dead and buried for six months and his wife says that five minutes ago he walked into their house with Doctor Charles Curtlin—living!"

"That's not a story—it's a headline!" cried Farley, making for the door. "Come on, Todd—what's delaying you?"

In something less than ten minutes Todd's high-powered open car, driven by his subordinate, Jackson, had whirled across Castletown's traffic-choked business district and was speeding through the tree-shaded suburbs westward. The car drew up in front of a large, rambling brick house with extensive grounds.

A small cluster of excited men and women were gathered on the sidewalk, peering in at the house and talking rapidly. A blue-clad patrolman was hurrying to disperse them and Todd ordered Jackson to remain at the street for the same purpose. Then he and Farley went quickly up the walk toward the brick mansion's pretentious entrance.

Todd was reaching toward the bell-push when the door was flung open. A dark-haired, middle-aged woman whose face was deathly pale almost pulled them into the hall inside.

"Thank God you've come, Mr. Todd!" she cried. "The servants are all gone—they fled in terror when they first saw him!"

"When they saw whom, Mrs. Clay?" Todd asked crisply.

"My husband—Howard Clay! He walked into the house with Doctor Curtlin hardly twenty minutes ago! I fainted when I saw him, and when I came to I found they had placed me on a couch and had gone into the library—and since my first thought was to call help, I called you!"

"Howard Clay living?" Todd said incredulously. "You're surely suffering from a delusion—it's been a half-year since Clay died and was buried, with half the town at his funeral."

"I know that!" Her voice rose. "I was with him when he died—but he's living now!"

"That is quite correct, Mr. Todd."

They all turned. Two men had come into the hall behind them, from an adjoining room.

One of them was tall and black-haired, with keen black eyes and strong-cut face. But it was the other, the man who had spoken, who held Todd and Farley

"My God, it's Kingley!" cried Helm. "Kingley—living!"

thunderstruck. He was short and thick-set, with graying hair. His plump face was dead-white as though all blood had been drained from it. He was returning their gaze quietly and both the detective and the reporter recognized him in the first mind-dazing moment.

"Great God—Howard Clay!" Todd exclaimed.

"Howard Clay — living — living!" choked Farley.

"Quite correct," Clay repeated. "May I ask why you gentlemen came here?"

Todd gripped himself. "Why did we come? We came to find out what this means, Clay! You were supposed to have died six months ago!"

"I did die six months ago," said Clay quietly.

"What?" Todd cried. "Do you mean to say——"

"I mean to say that six months ago I did die and was buried, and that I lay dead in my tomb until yesterday I was brought back to life!"

"Brought back to life? By whom?"

"By Doctor Curtlin here. I remember dying, and between that and the time I woke up in Curtlin's laboratory yesterday there is nothing in my mind but darkness."

Todd stared, stunned, from one to the other. Curtlin smiled. "Don't look so dazed, Todd," he said. "Every great scientific discovery of the past has seemed

just as incredible to those who first heard of it as this seems to you."

Farley's mind was working again. "Doctor Curtlin—I remember now," he exclaimed. "You're the physician who kicked up the stir in medical circles two years ago with a claim that you could rebuild and revivify disintegrating life-cells by a new combination of rays."

"That is the basis of my process," Curtlin admitted. "Naturally, I am not going to give its details to any one."

"But you took Clay's body from the tomb," said the awed reporter; "you brought him back to life with that process——"

The voice of the woman behind him interrupted him. "Then you *were* dead, Howard!" she cried. "I knew that you were—I knew——"

Clay's face softened. "I was, but I am living now, Helen," he said. "I would have spared you this shock if I could have." He took a step toward her.

"Don't come near me!" she screamed. "You can't be living now when you say yourself that you were dead! I followed you myself to your tomb, and now—oh God, now you've come back!"

"Helen, I am living!" Clay desperately insisted. "I did die, but I've been brought back to life just as an unconscious man can be brought back to consciousness!"

"I only know that you died and were buried!" she cried. "I won't stay here with you. I'm going to leave this house now!"

"Helen, do I mean nothing more to you than that?" Clay pleaded. "Does the twenty years we lived together mean nothing?"

"I lived those years with a living man," she said unsteadily. "I can't—I can't live with a dead one."

She turned and stumbled from the hall. Clay's face held anguish as he turned toward the others.

"Clay, come out with the truth," Todd urged. "You feigned death and disappeared for some reason, and now you're trying to explain it with this insane story of Curtlin's."

"Is it so insane, Todd?" Curtlin asked. "Life is a mere chemical activity in certain organic substances—is it insane to think that when that activity halts it can be started again?"

Todd ignored him. "You had some reason for disappearing, Clay!" he insisted. "Didn't you tell me a short time before your supposed death that you were uneasy about some threats that had been made against you?"

"I did tell you that but I was wrong," Clay said dully. "It is all as I have said—I died in this house and knew nothing more until I woke in Curtlin's laboratory."

Todd turned to the other. "Curtlin, do you realize what this story of yours will do when it gets out? Millions of people will believe it—will believe that you have actually brought a man back from the dead! Intelligent people will know that it is a fake of some kind, but masses of the ignorant will put full faith in it and it will loose among them a terrific wave of superstition, fanaticism and insanity!"

"I care nothing whatever for the opinions of either intelligent or ignorant," Curtlin calmly answered. "I am giving this experiment of mine a complete test and when I have done so it's my intention to stop—and not until then."

"So you both stick to the story?" Todd said. "It won't do, Clay—sooner or later the truth will be found out!"

"There is nothing to find out," Clay said wearily. "I have told you the truth—please go now, both of you."

TODD turned helplessly, and Farley followed him out of the door into the late autumn sunlight.

The crowd in the street had increased in numbers despite the efforts of Jackson and the patrolman, those in it gazing with awe-struck faces toward the house. Few seemed in any desire to go closer to the house of the man who had come back from death, but a ripple of excited voices was heard as Todd and Farley emerged.

Todd paid no attention to them other than to bid the patrolman to retain his post in front of the house. In a low voice he ordered Jackson to remain and keep an unobtrusive watch over the Clay place, and then he and Farley climbed into the car. Todd paused, though, as he was about to start the car.

The door of the Clay residence had opened and Helen Clay was coming down the walk, a small suitcase in her hand. She moved like one in a dream, her face devoid of color, and the whispering onlookers hastily made way for her as she stepped toward a hastily summoned taxicab that had just dashed up. Todd and Farley glimpsed the dead-white face of Clay staring from a window after the cab as it drove away. It vanished in a moment, and Todd drove away.

When they reached his office in the graystone county building a little later, Todd and Farley reached together for the telephones. For the next minutes Farley poured a stream of facts into the ears of an eager city editor. He learned that already the wildest rumors concerning Clay's return from the dead and Curtlin's part in it were sweeping through the city. When he hung up he found that Todd too had finished and was staring at the wall with knitted brows.

"This business is incredible, Farley," Todd said. "I've been talking to Helm, the doctor who attended Clay and signed his death certificate, and Morton, the undertaker who had charge of his burial."

"What did they say?" asked the reporter quickly.

"Helm said that Clay died quite suddenly from heart-failure and that there was not the slightest doubt he was dead —his heart having stopped, his lungs collapsed, and rigor mortis setting in. He said he'd swear that Clay was not in any cataleptic condition or trance but was stone-dead. Morton said the same thing —that he'd prepared Clay for burial himself, and that he'd take oath that he was dead."

"Good Lord!" Farley exclaimed. "Then Curtlin did bring him back to life—a man dead for months!"

"He did not!" Todd said savagely. "Clay is living now and that means he was never dead!"

"But Helm and Morton are men of unimpeachable character — they both knew Clay and you say they swear he was dead. His wife says he was dead—she can't believe he's living now—and Clay himself admits it."

"I'll never believe that Curtlin or any other man can bring the dead to life!" Todd asserted. "There's something behind this—this fantastic story of Curtlin reviving the dead is only a blind to conceal the true facts as to Clay's disappearance and return."

"But why should Clay have wanted to disappear? He had no financial worries, being a millionaire two or three times over. He wasn't mixed up with any woman, for you saw how devoted he is to his wife."

"You heard him admit that he told me before his supposed death about threats made to him," Todd reminded. "That has something to do with this—I wish I knew just what."

"You mean that Clay feigned death to escape some danger? I don't believe it! No matter what reasons he might have had, his wife and Helm and Morton all swear he was really dead, and it's impossible that they should all be in a conspir-

acy. Not to speak of Curtlin! Why, Curtlin's one of the biggest medical men in this part of the country! He has a record in a half-dozen lines—is a brilliant biologist, a brilliant bacteriologist, a brilliant plastic surgeon and I don't know what else. Curtlin would hardly lend himself to a conspiracy such as you seem to think exists."

"Then you think Curtlin did take Clay's six-months' dead body from his tomb and bring it back to life?" Todd asked unbelievingly.

"I think that, and it's what the city and the nation and the world will think when this news spreads," Farley asserted. "Todd, your criminal experience has warped you—you're not up against some petty plot here but against an epoch-making scientific achievement. To bring the dead back to life—why, Curtlin's name will be ringing around the world in a few days!"

Todd rose. "You may be right, but while it's ringing I'm going to follow this case in my own warped and petty way. And I'm going to find out first whether there was actually a body buried in Howard Clay's coffin and whether Curtlin did take that body."

"You're fighting against facts, but I'll stay with you," Farley said. "You're going to the cemetery now?"

The detective nodded. "The Clay vault is in Greenview—it's just at the edge of town."

THE autumn twilight was thickening when Todd and Farley reached the cemetery. It lay on a long slope just beyond the suburbs, a forest of white stones and shafts that showed palely in the dusk. In summer sunlight the place would have seemed peaceful, but beneath the chill and darkness of gathering night it was oppressive.

The two drove through its curving white roads toward the adjoining cottage of the cemetery's caretaker. When they reached the small stone house they had hardly knocked before the door opened. A thin, elderly man with worried countenance faced them, and Farley thought that he paled as he recognized them.

"You're Binns, the caretaker here, aren't you?" Todd asked, as they stepped inside.

"Yes, I am, Mr. Todd." The man seemed making an effort to remain calm. "When I heard the news from town I thought you'd be out here soon."

"You've heard about Howard Clay's return?" Todd asked keenly. "Then you know why I came out here?"

"I do, and I may as well tell you the truth straight off. There is no body in Howard Clay's coffin and there hasn't been for the last four months!"

"Go on," said Todd grimly.

"I will, sir. Four months ago I was awakened near midnight by a sound out in the cemetery. I dressed hastily and went out with my electric lantern, just in time to see a truck running without lights turn out of the cemetery and speed away. I was alarmed and began an immediate inspection to see what had been taking place.

"I found that the Clay vault had been broken into and that Howard Clay's coffin was empty. But I found more than that, too! Two other private vaults had been broken into, the Barton and Kingley ones! And in those the coffins of Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley were empty!

"The three bodies that had been taken were those of the three richest and most important men who had died in the last year! Because of that I knew that if I reported it I would lose my job at once, so said nothing in the hope that the robbery would not be discovered. Now this return of Howard Clay has brought it all

out, but I'm telling you the whole truth. Whoever took Clay's body took those of Barton and Kingley too."

2

"BARTON and Kingley's bodies gone too!" Farley gasped. "Todd, this must mean——"

"It means complications," said Todd, his face grim. "Binns, did you have no clue at all as to who committed the robbery?"

"None at all, sir—I just got a glimpse of the truck and that was all," the caretaker answered. "But they're saying in town that Doctor Curtlin admitted taking Howard Clay's body and bringing him back to life. That means it must have been he who took the bodies of Barton and Kingley, too."

"Whether he did or not," Todd said, "will have to be proved. Binns, before long there will be a flock of reporters and curious people out here asking you about Howard Clay's coffin. Tell them all you've told us, except the part about Barton and Kingley. Don't let any one know that any bodies other than that in Clay's coffin were taken."

"I won't," the other promised. "You'll maybe put in a word for me with the cemetery directors?"

"If you do as I've asked," Todd agreed. "I want to use your telephone for a moment now and then Farley and I are going back."

When Todd finished his brief telephone conversation and joined Farley in the car, darkness had fallen. He switched on the lights and was silent as they drove back out through the cemetery's winding ways.

"Well," Farley finally said, "this must have convinced you that you were wrong about Curtlin and Clay, Todd."

"Why should it?" the detective countered. "I expected to find that Howard Clay's coffin had been robbed."

"But you didn't expect the bodies of Barton and Kingley to be gone too! That fact alone shows that this was no mere plot to cover up Clay's disappearance, for in that case why should these two other bodies have been taken?"

"Why do you think they were taken?" Todd asked.

"I think Curtlin took all three bodies to subject to his process," Farley affirmed promptly, "and that with the process he has already brought the first of the three, Howard Clay, back to life! Curtlin said himself that he meant to give his process a complete test and then drop it once and for all, and I think that means he is going to bring Barton and Kingley back to life too."

"Howard Clay, Willis Barton, and Stephen Kingley," mused the detective. "Why did Curtlin select those three for his test, if you're right? They all died in the last year, or were supposed to have died, they were all rich, millionaires and more, and they were all of middle age or over. There's something behind those facts—something that eludes me."

"Todd, you're chasing your nose!" Farley declared. "Look at the facts. Curtlin announced two years ago that he was working on a process to restore in dead and decaying cells the chemical activity of life. Biologists and physicians who heard his address on the subject said that the idea was far-fetched but not impossible. He must have been working on the process ever since, and finally perfected it.

"To test it, he took those three bodies from the cemetery. He selected the bodies of wealthy and important citizens because, being well-known, there was no doubt as to their deaths and if he did bring them to life there could be no cries that they had never been dead. Curtlin

did bring the first of them, Howard Clay, back to life, and quite naturally at once told of his experiment and its success. Those are the simple facts, Todd, but because they're too startling for you to accept you build up moonshine plots and conspiracies of whose existence you haven't one scrap of real evidence!"

Todd smiled. "I don't say you're wrong, Farley. But I do deny that Curtlin or any other scientist can work miracles."

"What are you going to do, then—tell Clay that he is really dead and ought to go back to the cemetery?"

"No, hardly that," the detective answered. "Farley, you've been in with me in lots of cases and have kept back from your paper part of what you learned when I asked you, haven't you?"

"Yes, and I get your meaning," Farley said. "You want me too to keep quiet about Barton and Kingley."

"About that, and about what we're now going to do."

"What *are* we going to do?"

"We're going to have a look inside the house and laboratories of Doctor Charles Curtlin," Todd told him.

"Todd, that's a risky business, without a search warrant!"

"Not too risky—my telephone call back there was to Jackson. He's still watching Clay's house and he says Curtlin is still there. That gives us a free hand, for I doubt that Curtlin would have any servants around his place at night."

"It'll be wasted effort," Farley predicted, "prowling around Curtlin's place when other reporters are getting interviews from him. But I'm with you, and I'll give that wolf of a city editor no more than you say."

"All right, then—Curtlin's place is over in the northern district," Todd told him. "House, office and laboratories combined—we'll be there in ten minutes."

Thereafter they were silent as Todd drove across the outlying sections of the city. He kept to the greater darkness of the lesser arteries of traffic, avoiding the light-rimmed lanes in which the golden headlights of many cars swept in toward the central city in a shining stream. They could hear newsboys shouting extras as they crossed these busier streets, and the excited voices of men who that night had but one subject for conversation.

They soon entered into a district of old-fashioned houses, for the most part surrounded by spacious grounds. Todd stopped the car by the curb in the darkness between two street-lights, and he and Farley emerged from it without words. The detective led the way at once from the broad street into an unlighted alley or way running parallel with it some distance behind it.

THE blackness was chartless to the reporter but Todd appeared to know his way. They followed the unpaved alley for a few minutes, passing between two rows of houses all of a thousand feet apart, visible only by their lighted windows. Then Todd made a cautioning gesture, led in past a low garage-building and toward a large stone house which was completely dark.

It also was surrounded by a large plot of ground, and the two crossed a service-lawn and a small garden and then stood motionless by its wall, listening. There was no sound from within or around the place, and Farley's spirits rose. It had been his fear that the unparalleled sensation of which Curtlin was the center would have brought a horde of the curious to the place, but it was evident that the news of the work Curtlin had carried on there had been enough to make the place conspicuously shunned after night.

Todd seemed satisfied that the coast was clear, for he now led on again. He

stopped by a basement window and crouched over this. It was locked, but Todd worked at it with a glittering little instrument. There came the snip of severing steel, and he softly swung the window open, then swung silently down into the dark interior.

His face reappeared as a white blur inside the dark window, his hand beckoning wordlessly. Farley swung down after him, Todd holding and steadying the reporter. They stood touching, listening. There was no sound from the house above them. Todd moved, and then from his pocket-flash a little light-beam winked through the darkness.

It disclosed the fact that they were standing in a furnace-room. Todd located the door, and they passed through it to find themselves in a short hall.

Across this hall from them a steel door faced them, and beside them a flight of steps led upward. Todd motioned toward the door.

"That will be the laboratory," he whispered. "It's all I want to see tonight—we've not got time to go through the whole place."

"This door's locked," Farley reported, trying it.

"Stand aside," the detective said, "and we'll see how good its lock is."

He had taken a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, and silently and rapidly he tried them in the steel door's lock. At last there came a welcome click and the door swung open.

They went a few steps inside and then Todd's beam winked. It disclosed no windows; so he turned and found the switch beside the door, and turned on the lights.

Flooded with light, the room disclosed itself to them as a large, long laboratory. It was concrete-walled and floored, quite without windows, but with ventilation-tubes. It held an amazing array of machinery and instruments.

Todd and Farley saw a large motor-generator and a series of transformers along one side of the room. A clutter of lamps, resistances and meters were connected with them and with a series of black-cased instruments quite unfamiliar in appearance. Heavily insulated cables in overhead racks carried most of the wiring.

These cables seemed to lead to another unfamiliar instrument suspended from the ceiling, an oblong thing like a big rectangular searchlight with thick lens of quartz or dull-glass pointing downward. Directly beneath it stood a six-foot long metal table, raised on insulated standards.

Beside this was a larger table, and on it two long objects wrapped in white sheets. Todd and Farley reached them together, turned back the coverings. The reporter recoiled at what met their eyes. They were bodies, the bodies of two middle-aged men. They had been dead for some time, time already having made ravages upon the bodies, but their faces were clear, unmistakable.

"Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley!" Farley exclaimed. "It was Curtlin who took all three bodies, then, for sure!"

"I expected to find them here," said Todd, unmoved.

"But this proves for certain that I was right!" the reporter said. "Curtlin took the bodies of the three—he's already brought Clay's back to life and is no doubt getting ready to do the same with these of Barton and Kingley."

"It proves that it was Curtlin who robbed those three coffins, at least," said Todd, his voice harsh. "With Clay living I couldn't charge him with taking Clay's body, but this is different—this gives me a charge on which to hold Curtlin."

"You're surely not going to arrest Curtlin on a grave-robbing charge!" Far-

ley exclaimed. "Why, Todd, you'll be snowed under with ridicule and indignation! No doubt Curtlin broke the letter of the law in taking the three bodies, but his bringing of one of them back to life is such a stupendous thing that he can't be held to account."

"He'll be held until he comes clean about this business," Todd answered. "I'm going to get a warrant the first thing tomorrow morning."

"Have it your own way, then," Farley said. "You'll find you're making a terrific mistake."

Todd did not answer other than to snap out the lights and lead the way into the hall again, relocking the door. They clambered out through the window by which they had entered, and in a few minutes had reached the car unobserved and were heading into town.

THEY found that the sensation of the afternoon had produced there an unprecedented excitement. The names of Curtlin and of Clay were on the lips of every one, and Curtlin's statement was being argued by groups on every corner. For the citizens of Castleton were divided over it.

Half of them, including all who had chanced to see Clay, were asserting that Curtlin had accomplished the greatest achievement in history. Clay was living: there could be no possible doubt as to that, and neither could there be any doubt that Clay had been dead, they argued. They pointed out that Curtlin's idea had been deemed possible by scientists when propounded two years before. Every bit of evidence supported the fact that he had achieved the incredible and had brought back to life a man who had lain dead for months in his tomb.

Others scoffed at the possibility of such a thing. They could not deny that Clay was living, but they denied that he had ever been dead. Some one else had died and been buried in his place, they asserted. It was learned that shortly after nightfall an examination of the Clay vault at the cemetery had been made, and that as expected Clay's coffin was empty. But that did not prove, the doubters asserted, that it was Clay's body that had formerly occupied the coffin.

The city hung with tense interest upon the question as to whether Clay had or had not been dead. Helm, the doctor, and Morton, the undertaker, whom Todd had previously questioned, felt impelled to make affidavits to the effect that they had handled Howard Clay's body after his death and that he had been unquestionably dead. As both Helm and Morton were men of undoubted integrity, their statements added fuel to the flames.

Yet Curtlin, rather than Clay, was the center of interest. Clay himself had received but a single group of former friends and reporters. Seeming to shrink in dread from the blaze of publicity in which he found himself, Clay had only reiterated his statement that he had known nothing from the time he died until he had awakened in Curtlin's laboratory. Beyond that he would not talk of his experience, but Curtlin was more communicative.

Curtlin calmly stated that he had actually brought Clay's corpse into life again by the ray-process he had announced two years before, but that he did not intend ever to divulge the details of that process. It was not his plan, he added, to attempt a general resurrection of the dead, for it was his belief that the process would be useless on the dead of more than eight or nine months back. In any case, he repeated, his intention was to give the process a thorough testing and then drop it forever.

In that pronouncement of Curtlin's, Farley read confirmation of his own be-

lief. "It's just as I told you," he told Todd when they had heard. "Curtlin's going on and test the thing on those other two bodies and then drop it."

"Why should he drop it if it's actually successful?" asked Todd skeptically.

"Because he knows what it would do to the world if he kept it up, or let the process be published. Think of a world in which the dead could be brought back at will! A world in which corpses could be revived, perhaps time after time! Fear—fear of death—is the mainspring of civilization, and Curtlin knows if he publishes his process the mainspring is broken!"

Todd shook his head. "Farley, I've seen a lot of weird things happen or seem to happen in my time, but underneath every one of them I found some crooked game. Curtlin has one, though I don't know what it is. But when I get that warrant tomorrow morning and bring him in, you'll see that sooner or later he'll come out with it."

"You're wrong, Todd—you don't know how wrong," said Farley. "But I'll be here in the morning, for when you arrest Curtlin the story about the bodies of Barton and Kingley will break."

Farley left with that and reached his rooms, weary from the exciting day. He set his alarm-clock for an early hour and turned in, sinking at once into sleep.

He awoke the next morning to rush through dressing and breakfast and start at once for the gray county building. As he neared it he noticed that around it groups had formed in the morning crowds, talking excitedly. It was apparent that the sensation of the preceding day was intensified. Wondering whether Todd had already arrested Curtlin, Farley broke into a run. He gave a sigh of relief as he saw Todd and Jackson emerging rapidly from the building.

"Todd!" he exclaimed as he reached them. "You're going after Curtlin now?"

"That's off, Farley," Todd answered. "Something has happened!"

"What is it?"

"You remember that we saw Willis Barton's body there in Curtlin's laboratory last night?"

"Yes, but what's happened? Has Barton's body been missed at the cemetery?"

"More than that," said Todd, grim-voiced. "Fifteen minutes ago Willis Barton walked into his own house—alive!"

3

"BARTON alive!" cried Farley. "Good God, Todd, this is proof absolute of Curtlin's statement! We saw Barton's body there ourselves—a body that had been dead for months!"

"It's proof that there's more to this than I thought," Todd said. "Get in the car, Farley—we're going out to see Barton now. Whatever kind of devil's work this is, I'm going to get to the bottom of it."

"You're crazy!" Farley exclaimed as the car leapt forward. "If you don't believe in this now you're fighting what you yourself know to be the truth!"

"We'll see," said Todd shortly. "There's still something I've got to see explained—still something."

The car was tearing westward across the city through the morning sunlight, dodging through the lines of city-bound commuters as Jackson drove it with increased speed through the suburbs.

"How did you get the news of Willis Barton returning?" Farley asked, holding his hat against the rush of wind.

"Lodgekeeper at Barton's place called," Todd said. "Said that a car drove in that had Barton and Doctor Curtlin in it. They went into the house and then Curtlin came out and drove off. The

lodgekeeper had heard about Clay returning from the dead and when he saw Willis Barton doing the same thing he was scared and called me straight off."

"Thank God, Barton's family is in Europe!" Farley said. "The shock of his return might have killed his wife and daughters as it almost did Mrs. Clay."

"What was Barton supposed to have died of?" Todd asked as they rounded a turn on two wheels.

"Apoplexy, about seven months ago," the reporter answered. "But it wasn't supposed, Todd—he did die! Damn it, man, we saw his body ourselves last night! Curtlin must have gone home last night and put his process to work on it, brought Barton back to life just as he did Clay! This clinches Curtlin's statement all right!"

Todd made no answer, for Jackson was bringing the car to a halt at a gateway of iron flanked by great stone pillars, from which in turn extended a long stone wall on either side.

Inside the gates and beside the lodgehouse a weather-beaten elderly man was standing guard. He peered at them, then swung the gates open.

"It's you, Mr. Todd—I am not supposed to open to any one without word from the house, but you can go on in."

"That's all right," Todd said. "We'll take the responsibility for it."

"You needn't for my sake," the other said. "I am quitting here this day—a place where the dead come back as though alive is no place for me."

The car leapt through the gateway and down a long, tree-bordered drive toward the bulky white mansion visible ahead. They drew up in front of the big building's main entrance, and Todd and Farley walked quickly up to the door. They had rung for but a minute before the door opened and a tall and truculent-looking man confronted them.

Todd and Farley gasped, unnerved. They had expected a servant to answer the door and this was the man they had come to see. They stared at him, unable to believe their eyes. The tall, big-boned figure, the iron-gray hair, the strong-jawed face—it was the man they had seen lying in death and decay in Curtlin's laboratory! But now he stood living before them! Only his face was dead-white still, as Clay's had been.

"Willis Barton!" Todd was exclaiming, half to himself. "Willis Barton, and living now!"

"Mr. Todd, this is an intrusion!" Barton barked angrily. "I gave no orders that you were to be admitted."

"My God, Barton!" Farley burst out. "Do you realize that you were dead and have been brought back—the second man in two days?"

The reporter's word seemed to unleash Barton's fury. "What if I was dead? I'm living now and I'm going to be treated as a living man and not as some museum curiosity!"

"Calm down, Barton," Todd said sharply. "I've got a few questions to ask you, and living or dead you're subject to the law."

"Ask them and be done, then," Barton snapped. "I'm in no mood to go through an inquisition."

"Your death in this house was reported seven months ago. Can you say where you have been since then?"

"Of course not! I remember absolutely nothing from the moment I died until I awoke an hour ago in Curtlin's laboratory."

"Did Curtlin tell you that he had also brought Clay back to life?"

"He told me—yes. I can hardly believe anything of this so far, my mind is so confused."

"Did you know Curtlin well before your—er—death?" Todd pursued.

"Not well," said Barton, frowning. "I was acquainted with him and knew of some of his work by reputation."

"One question more," Todd said. "About nine months ago a half-dozen important men in this town told me, at different times, that they had received mysterious and rather alarming threats. Clay was one of these, and you, Barton, were another. Did these vague threats you told me of then have anything to do with your supposed death and revival?"

"Absolutely not!" flamed Barton. "The threats I told you about were mere crank-letters—they had nothing at all to do with this, and I refuse to answer any more of your questions. I have broken no laws and I will not be treated as a criminal suspect."

"Mr. Barton, one minute!" Farley detained him. "Wouldn't you give me a short statement for publication on your sensations in dying and reviving? It would be of world-wide interest."

"I can not," Barton answered shortly. "I promised Doctor Curtlin that I would give no information that might in any way disclose the details of his process. Gentlemen, I bid you good day."

THE door shut hard and Todd and Farley stared at each other, then turned toward the car. From it Jackson had been a spectator of their interview and his voice was excited as they entered the car.

"Willis Barton all right, wasn't it? This will tear the town apart for fair!"

"It's likely to tear the world apart," Farley declared as their car swung back down the drive. "I'm beginning to see now why Curtlin is so set against letting any one know his process."

"I think I'm beginning to see why too," Todd said.

Farley turned to face him. "Todd, if you still have any skepticism as to Curtlin's achievement you're just plain crazy! We saw Willis Barton dead there in the laboratory last night—dead for months. We saw Willis Barton standing living before us now! In the name of common sense what more do you want?"

"I want one thing explained," Todd said. "Just one thing."

"Lord, look ahead here!" Jackson interrupted. "Seems like half the town's out here already!"

They were nearing the gates and could see that a crowd of excited people numbering hundreds was gathered outside them, increasing rapidly. The lodgekeeper was working his best to keep them out, but while he guarded the gates newspaper and cameramen were climbing the wall on either side. A squad of police was just dashing up, emerging from their car and endeavoring to disperse the crowd.

The gates swung inward to allow their own car to pass out, and as it did so others in the crowd managed to slip through. When they were again in the street and Jackson was pointing the car toward town, Farley looked back.

"Barton's sure going to have a time with the newspapermen in the next few hours," he said. "They're pouring into town from every quarter of the compass."

"It's to be expected," Todd said. "And the thing has hardly sunk in yet—when it does there'll be hell here."

"It's put this town on the map with a bang, all right," Farley agreed. "Todd, I hope you're convinced by now that this thing is no mere criminal plot."

"I'm convinced that you're convinced," Todd answered dryly. "I'm going to see Curtlin now—are you coming with me?"

"Right with you—from now on every word of Curtlin's is news. There'll prob-

ably be more reporters at this place than at Barton's."

FARLEY found his prediction verified when they reached Curtlin's establishment a little later. As they drove up to the big house they saw that a dense crowd choked the street outside it, larger by several times than that they had left at Barton's. The crowd was evidently in a state of highest excitement, and blue-clad officers were trying in vain to scatter it.

Todd's badge passed him and the reporter through the officers, and they went inside. It was their first glimpse of the interior proper of the place, since in their burglarious entry of the preceding night they had confined themselves to the laboratory below. The ground floor was fitted up to hold offices and a small clinic, and these rooms were filled with several dozen excited newspapermen, cameramen and officials.

All were pressing toward Curtlin, whose tall figure rose near a corner, the center of attraction. Curtlin was answering, calmly and deliberately, the rapid-fire questions of the excited reporters.

"No, I refuse entirely to allow any one an inspection of my laboratory," he was saying with finality. "I have said that my process shall not be divulged and I mean it."

"But, Doctor Curtlin!" one of the newspapermen pleaded. "You can't treat the reading public in this way—we have pictures of Clay and Barton and yourself and the cemetery—all we need is one of the laboratory in which you brought them back to life."

"I have not the slightest interest in the reading public," Curtlin replied. "I am carrying out a scientific experiment, and it has absolutely no concern with the public."

Todd had pushed through the throng to Curtlin's side. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind answering one or two questions of my own?" he asked.

Curtlin recognized him. "Mr. Todd, the skeptical representative of law and order!" he said, his black eyes mocking. "What is it you would like to know?"

"I'd like to know, if it isn't giving anything away, just how long your process of revival takes?"

"I've no objection to telling that. After the preliminary preparations are made the ray-process itself requires only about thirty minutes."

"Can you tell us when you began using the process upon Willis Barton's body?"

"About four this morning. When I had brought him back it took a little time for him to accustom himself to what had happened, and then I drove him out to his home."

If Todd was disappointed his face did not show it. He changed his tack.

"Curtlin, you'll admit, I suppose, that you were the one who took the bodies of Howard Clay and Willis Barton from the cemetery four months ago. Did you know that the body of Stephen Kingley was taken also at that time?"

"Yes," said Curtlin calmly. "I took it myself, and Kingley's body is down in my laboratory now."

His answer created a sensation among the newspapermen who had been crowding closer to listen.

"What? Do you mean to say that you're going to bring Kingley back to life too, Doctor Curtlin?" cried one of them.

"I mean just that," Curtlin replied. "I had not intended to announce it just yet, but since Todd's question has brought it out I have no objection to doing so. Four months ago I deliberately broke the law in taking from the cemetery the three bodies of Howard Clay, Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley. I felt that I was justified in doing so by the tremendous

importance of the work I meant to attempt with them."

"One moment, Doctor," a sharp-faced reporter interrupted. "It is known that you are not a rich man—did you select the bodies of these three wealthy men with the idea that they would each pay you a large fee for bringing them back to life?"

"Absolutely no!" Curtlin snapped. "I selected Clay and Barton and Kingley because it was beyond doubt that they were dead and if my experiment succeeded it could not be said that the subjects of it had never been dead. I brought the three bodies here, and for four months they have been down in my laboratory while I worked to make my process capable of the rebuilding and revivification of human tissues.

"I finally succeeded in doing so but a few days ago. I prepared Clay's body and using the process on him yesterday brought him back to life. Because there seemed doubt on the part of many as to the reality of my achievement, I used the process on Barton's corpse early this morning and was able to revive him also.

"It was and is my purpose to test the process finally on the third body, that of Kingley, and then to consider the experiment concluded and to drop it forever, to smash my apparatus and burn my notes. For as I have said, and as I firmly believe, this bringing of the dead to life is important and valuable as a laboratory achievement but would wreck civilization if it were put into the hands of humanity. For that reason I am concluding the experiment with Kingley and am resolved never to work again on it thereafter."

"But when are you going to bring Kingley back to life, then?" Farley asked. The crowd hung tensely on the answer.

"I can see that I'll not be let alone until it's finished," Curtlin said. "Well, I've already made the preliminary chemical preparations with Kingley's body—I'll start the ray-process on it after eleven and will have him living by noon."

There was an excited burst of hoarse voices. "But you'll allow us to be here?" some one pleaded. "You'll allow us to see Kingley's body before you do it?"

"I will under certain conditions," Curtlin answered sharply. "In the first place, no one is going to enter my laboratory, during the process or before or after it. I want the police-guard here doubled to make sure of that. You may wait in these rooms, however, while the process is going on.

"In the second place, I have no objection to your seeing and examining Kingley's dead body before I begin the process. But I will have it in these rooms for you at eleven, and you'll view it here before I take it back to the laboratory. I have no objection to your satisfying any doubts you may have, but I am resolved that under no circumstances shall any one witness my process or apparatus."

"Great heavens!" cried some one. "What a story!"

"Todd—you heard!" Farley exclaimed. "This means final public proof of the thing!"

Todd's face was set. "For the present," Curtlin was saying, "I must ask all of you to leave, as I have much to do. At eleven you can return, but until then you'll find it useless to try to pass the police I have asked here to guard the place. Please leave now, gentlemen."

"One final question!" shouted a reporter. "Will Clay and Barton, the men you've already brought to life, be here when you revive Kingley?"

"I have no doubt that they will," Curtlin said, "as both of them are naturally highly interested in my work. No more questions, now—please go."

As the excited throng poured out into the choked street Farley grasped Todd's

arm. "Todd, this is the end of all doubt! You'll be here at eleven when he does it?"

"I'll be here," Todd answered. "And we'll see what we will see."

BOTH Farley and Todd had evidence in the next few hours of the wild and unparalleled excitement that Curtlin's new statement had let loose. The city of Castleton was seething with it, and it centered around that big, old-fashioned house, guarded by blue-clad police on all sides, that they had just left.

Farley hastened through shouting streets in which all ordinary activities had halted, to find the offices of his newspaper the scene of even greater excitement. His latest news was literally torn from him and rushed upon the press. The teletype wires that connected with the far-flung nervous system of the world's information facilities were hot with appeals for more and still more facts on this stunning thing.

The names of Curtlin and Clay and Barton and Kingley were going out to the world by telegraph and telephone and written word. Every train that entered Castleton was disgorging new scores of newspapermen, photographers and special writers. Planes were coming in from distant cities with others.

When Farley returned to Curtlin's place a full hour before the appointed hour of eleven, he found the scene there one of chaos. The streets for blocks around were packed with hoarse-voiced humanity through which he had to push his way. He reached the house to find that the double rank of police outside it were inexorably holding out the mob of reporters and citizens.

Farley, pushing to the front, saw that the house itself presented no sign of life. Of Curtlin nothing could be seen, but he learned from a fellow newsman that he had appeared for a brief moment at one of the lower windows. He learned also that save for the police who guarded it on all sides Curtlin was apparently working alone in the house, not risking the presence of any aids or servants.

As the hours of eleven approached, the crowd became denser and greater, almost unmanageable. Farley glimpsed Todd, his face still set and grave, struggling through the throng. The detective saw him and pushed toward him. There came a sudden tremendous roar of excited voices as Clay and Barton arrived, almost at the same time.

Each of the two was protected by an escort of a half-dozen policemen who pushed a way for them through the mob. Both Clay and Barton seemed stunned by the scene about them, their dead-white faces glancing desperately this way and that. The passage through the crowd of these two men whom all in it knew to have been dead created a tremendous sensation, and during it Todd reached Farley's side.

"It's almost time!" Farley told the detective over the roar of voices. "Helm and about a half-dozen doctors are in this crowd—going to make sure that Kingley is dead, all right!"

"How about Kingley's relatives?" Todd asked.

"None here. He was a bachelor with some cousins, but they're too far away to get here. But look—there's Curtlin now!"

The door of the house had opened and Curtlin had emerged onto its veranda, bareheaded and in white laboratory-jacket. Another excited roar split the air but Curtlin did not heed it, spoke crisply to the captain of the police before the house. Clay and Barton had passed through these and were joining Curtlin on the veranda,

seeming half-dazed. The three passed into the house and the mob surged irresistibly forward.

Todd and Farley were in its front rank and were hastily let through by the officers. The latter were struggling to keep back the tremendous horde of the curious and admit only the limited number of officials and reporters Curtlin had specified. These hastened in and in hardly more than a minute Todd and Farley found the rooms about them filled with excited men.

CLAY and Barton stood dazedly against the wall, but Curtlin stood at the center of his clinic room beside a wheeled steel table that bore a long, white-wrapped figure. The sight of that as much as Curtlin's commanding black eyes swept the rooms to silence.

"The body of Stephen Kingley is here beside me," his incisive voice told them, "and I am willing that a limited number of you ascertain for yourself that Kingley is actually dead. But there will be no crowding and no disorder or you will all be excluded from these rooms."

A tall, lanky man stepped forward. "No objection to my looking at him, I presume?" he asked.

"None at all, Doctor Helm," said Curtlin promptly. "Since I see Doctors Braun and Leonard also here they also may look, if they care. You are all competent medically and all knew Kingley by sight."

He reached and turned back the white sheet that covered the figure on the wheeled table. An involuntary sigh went up as Kingley's body was exposed, with all its evidence of death and decay. A pungent odor of strong and unfamiliar chemicals filled the room.

"Kingley, all right," said Helm after one glance at the dead-white face, and Braun and Leonard nodded. They bent over the body and then Helm straightened.

"There is no need for an examination, Doctor Curtlin," he said. "I presume that every man in this room can see that Kingley is dead and has been for some months."

"Dead, all right," said Doctor Leonard, straightening. "From heart-failure in this case also, if I remember rightly?"

"Yes," said Curtlin. "Is every one satisfied that Kingley is dead? Mr. Todd—wouldn't you like to set your doubts at rest?"

At Curtlin's mocking challenge a laugh went up, but Todd moved to the table's side. "Don't mind if I do," he said quietly, gazing at the body before him.

When he stepped back Curtlin recovered the body with the sheet. "I am now going to take the body back down to the laboratory and subject it to the ray-process," he stated. "When I have finished you shall know, but until I do, the guards here will prevent any one from penetrating to the lower floor."

Helm and Leonard stepped forward to grasp the table's edge, but Curtlin motioned them decisively back. "Two of the officers will help me wheel this down," he told them.

He signed to two of the policemen and they grasped the light steel table at either end and proceeded with it toward the stairs leading downward. Curtlin followed them as they lifted it down the steps, and in a moment the two came back and took their place with the others guarding the door of the stairs. In a moment came the click of a steel door opening and closing beneath, and a storm of excited voices again broke out in the rooms.

"Todd, you saw for yourself!" Farley

said. "It was Kingley, dead! Just as when we saw him in the laboratory last night!"

"It was Kingley and he was dead, yes," Todd answered.

"You'll have to believe if he does it this time—you'll have to!"

"What's he doing down there?" asked a reporter beside them in an awed voice. "Listen!"

A steady purring sound had become audible from below, rising rapidly into a loud whine as of great dynamos. Soon it was joined by a steady buzzing.

"He's doing it!" muttered another. "He's bringing that corpse back to life! My God, are we all crazy?"

"What about it, Mr. Clay?" some one asked one of the two dead-faced men by the wall. "Can't you or Barton give us some idea as to the general nature of Curtlin's process?"

"I know nothing—nothing!" said Clay, his hands trembling.

"Listen to them outside!" Farley exclaimed. "They're going crazy out there waiting for news!"

The dull roar of voices from without was audible above the whining, buzzing sounds from below. Minutes were fleeting. Farley found his own hands shaking, but Todd's face was unchanged.

"Curtlin says he's going to wreck his apparatus as soon as this is over," some one else was saying. "If he doesn't, God help humanity!"

"It's too late," another answered. "They'll get the secret of his process out of him some way, sooner or later."

"Listen!" exclaimed a reporter. "The sounds down there have stopped!" The whine and buzz had halted abruptly but as suddenly began again. Then in moments——

"They've stopped again! I can't hear a thing from down there now!"

Farley found Helm beside him, the doctor's face wet with sweat. "Why in God's name doesn't he finish it if he can do it?" Helm was asking. "I can't stand——"

He stopped, and the room became dead-silent. From below had come a series of vague sounds beyond recognition. Then in moments the click of the door opening, and the shuffling sound of slow steps, on the floor beneath, on the stair!

FARLEY felt his skin crawling as with Todd and all about them he gazed toward the door that like a magnet held their eyes. The steps came slowly nearer, louder, and the guards at the door stepped aside. The door opened. They saw Curtlin rising up through it, his face crimson, supporting a stumbling figure wrapped in a white sheet. And that figure—that dead-white face that had stared up at them from the dead body on the table minutes before—that man——

"My God, it's Kingley — Kingley!" cried Helm, his voice unrecognizable. "Kingley—living——"

"Todd—Todd, he's done it!" Farley yelled. The room was in wild uproar.

"I told you that I'd do it!" Curtlin's voice flared triumphantly. "The third one I've brought back—from the tomb!"

"The tomb?" said Kingley, his eyes staring, his voice thick. "But I haven't been—I haven't surely been——"

"Dead, and I've brought you back!" Curtlin cried. "Is there any of you who disbelieve now?" he challenged fiercely. "Todd, do you still believe it's all a plot? Do you want to ask Kingley whether he was dead or not?"

"I'd like to ask him something, yes!" Todd's voice stabbed.

"Go on, then!" cried Curtlin. Todd stepped to the swaying, white-wrapped man.

"Kingley, I want the answer to just one question. You were one of several men in this town who nine months ago told me your lives had been threatened. Did those threats have anything to do with all this?"

Kingley's thick tongue strove for utterance. "No, no, Todd—I found out later that the threats I told you about meant nothing. But I died—they say I've been dead——"

"There's your answer, Todd!" Curtlin cried. "The same answer Clay and Barton gave you, and it smashes your childish plot-theories!"

"On the contrary!" Todd said. "Those three answers from Clay and Barton and Kingley are all the proofs I need!"

"Proofs of what?" cried Curtlin.

"Proofs that these three men are not Clay and Barton and Kingley at all! No one ever told me of any threats and these three in remembering something they never told me have proved that they are not Clay and Barton and Kingley!

"Clay and Barton and Kingley died just as everybody thought and these three men are their doubles—doubles prepared by Curtlin's art as a plastic surgeon! No, don't try it, Curtlin——"

Curtlin was quick, but before his gun was more than half out Todd had shot twice, from his pocket. Curtlin swayed, a red stain spreading on his white jacket, and slumped to the floor. Those in the crowded room stood petrified, transfixed.

Todd knelt beside Curtlin. Bloody foam was on the physician's lips, and a twisted smile. His breath came in choking gasps.

"You win, Todd—I underestimated you. Don't be—too hard on other three—I was moving spirit of the thing. You'll find—bodies of real Clay and Barton and Kingley hidden in laboratory—hid them one by one as I brought their doubles out. What a joke—on me—that this ends—with—me—dead——"

His head rolled back. Todd straightened to face the three white-visaged men whom all had believed Clay and Barton and Kingley.

"You three are going to face conspiracy charges and maybe more," he said, and turned to the staring police-captain. "Take them out, the back way, before that crowd out there learns the truth."

"But Todd——!" Farley was choking. "How can they be doubles when we all recognized them—their friends and families recognized them—as Clay and Barton and Kingley?"

"It's simple enough," said Todd, to Farley and the spellbound men about them. "Curtlin was comparatively poor—you all knew that and commented on it. He was a brilliant plastic surgeon, as you informed me yourself, Farley, and as such could remold living faces at will. He decided to use his power in plastic surgery to bring himself millions.

"He started his plot two years ago with that address on the possibility of reviving life in dead tissues by ray-processes. Then he waited for his chance. It came between six and eight months ago when three of the richest men in this city, all millionaires, died. They were Howard Clay, Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley.

"Curtlin had known all three by sight and he must have started out after their deaths to procure three unscrupulous accomplices who resembled Clay and Barton and Kingley in the unalterable features of height, head-shape, figure and hair and eye-coloring. Where he secured his three accomplices we won't know until they confess, but he probably found them willing enough when he showed what immense rewards they'd get.

"He brought them into this house unknown to any one, and probably with their help robbed the cemetery of the bodies of Clay and Barton and Kingley. Then began four months of arduous work for him, the remolding of the living faces of his accomplices into exact replicas of the faces of those three dead men. All his art as a plastic surgeon he must have used, working patiently on muscle and bone and tissue, altering expression by working with supporting muscles, changing the shapes of noses and ears, letting his work heal and then going on with it. Gradually in those four months he rebuilt the faces of the three into replicas of the faces of the three dead men, using those dead faces as his models!

"A few days ago his work was finished. His three accomplices were to all appearances exact replicas in face and figure of the three dead men. Curtlin without doubt had given them handwriting of the three dead men to practise copying, and had trained them to speak in the same voices as Clay and Barton and Kingley. He had equipped them too with a minute store of knowledge concerning the lives and friends of the three dead men so that they could pass as them in every particular.

"One thing he may not have foreseen was the dead-whiteness of their faces after the plastic surgery had healed, but that fitted in with Curtlin's plan well enough, for that whiteness would seem natural in men brought back from the dead. Curtlin was all ready therefore to set his plan to working.

"That plan was none other than to install his three accomplices in the identities of Clay and Barton and Kingley by explaining that he had raised them by his process from death! That would make the three the masters of the millions of the three dead men, and Curtlin in turn by his hold over them would be master over all three. It was an incredibly daring plan, but it had every chance of succeeding. For even though many might not believe that he had actually revived the three from death, they would not question that the three really were Clay and Barton and Kingley. They would simply believe in that case that Clay and Barton and Kingley had never been dead at all.

"He began with Clay. He hid Clay's body as he said and then drove with the pseudo-Clay to the latter's home. His wife even believed that it was Clay, and knowing that her husband had really been dead she was terror-stricken. She called us, and though I was overwhelmed myself by the sight of Clay living I thought to ask that question about threats he had formerly reported to me. If he said that he didn't remember any such occurrence it could be Clay, but if he pretended to remember, it wasn't Clay but an impostor. He did pretend to remember, and I knew that though he was the image of Clay the man before me was not Clay.

"I still could hardly believe it, though. Farley and I learned that the bodies of Barton and Kingley had been taken also from the cemetery, and when we penetrated Curtlin's laboratory last night we found those bodies in it, with the elaborate apparatus he had faked in case any one entered the laboratory. The pseudo-Barton and pseudo-Kingley were probably then hiding in the upper floors of the house. Clay's body was not to be seen, for as he said, he had hidden it after the pseudo-Clay's first appearance.

"This morning came the news of Barton's return to life and we went out to see him. I tested him also. To all appearances he was Barton, the man we had seen dead hours before, but when I spoke of the threats I said he had told me of

before his death, he pretended to remember also and I knew that he also was an impostor. I began to understand Curtlin's game then, and I waited for him to stage a revival of Kingley too.

"He did it, here, and I was waiting to test Kingley, the last of the three, with the same question. You saw that he too pretended to remember something the real Kingley never said, and that was proof that all three were impostors and I confronted Curtlin with it. He saw the game was lost and in a mad access of hate drew his gun in an effort to kill me, and got killed himself.

"That's all there was to it. If those tests had not shown me that the three supposed returners from death were impostors, Curtlin's achievement would have been accepted as real. You all saw Kingley's dead body and then saw him bring up the pseudo-Kingley whom he had hidden down in the laboratory. And Curtlin would never have needed to repeat his supposed achievement, for he need only plead as he did that to continue it would wreck civilization. Whatever argument there was, no one would ever have questioned that his three accomplices were other than Clay and Barton and Kingley. He played for millions—played brilliantly—but he lost as even the most brilliant must do when he plays from the wrong side of the board."

"Then it was all a fake—and it took us in!" cried one of the newspapermen, half dazedly. "But at that it's as big a story as if it were true!"

"One side, there!" cried others. "Let me at a telephone, will you?"

In a moment they were all struggling out of the door, and then a swelling roar of voices told that the crowd outside was learning the truth.

Farley faced Todd, still dumfounded. "Todd, when I think that we all stepped right into Curtlin's deceptions and then bawled you out for not following us——"

"Forget it, Farley," the other advised. "It's fifty-fifty—I didn't like to hold out on you but didn't want Curtlin to know I was nearing the truth."

"And to think that Clay and Barton and Kingley remained dead and in this house through it all!" the reporter marvelled.

Todd nodded gravely. "We'll find their bodies hidden down there in the laboratory, and their families can give them another funeral or not as they see fit. Dead through it all—yes, they were the real three from the tomb, and they're going back there to stay."

Devouring Shadows

By N. J. O'NEAIL

A story of weird shadows from the fourth dimension, that descended upon our world to wipe it clean of life

HOW, or why, should I begin a statement of such a nature as this —a chronicle probably the most vital in the history of the human race; and yet one which, if so, can probably never be read by human eye; which, in fact, if ever so read, must stand self-confuted, the frenzied product of a madman's brain?

It is strange, that in the face of so overwhelming, so inescapable a horror, I should turn almost mechanically to pen and paper, as though by sharing my fears I should halve their intensity, or lighten the burden of numbing horror which weighs upon my soul. Should I not rather be upon my knees, in supplication to my Creator? Or is it blasphemy to dream that any plea of mine, or of any human creature, could avert the looming, inevitable cataclysm?

In any event, it is to my tablets that I have turned, like Hamlet, in a frenzied hope to face what may befall, with a sane mind. And there remains always the bare possibility that this record may yet be read —perhaps by eyes of which this world has never dreamed.

It is by agreement with Parfitt that I have undertaken so to apply my few remaining hours—Parfitt, who first, I believe, of any upon earth sensed the appalling truth; or he, at any rate, who first unfolded the vision to my shuddering and recoiling mind.

It is less than a week since the shadows beneath whose pall we cower today, like chickens when a hawk far overhead casts its black outline upon the ground—first fell like the nebulous, menacing tentacles of some cosmic monster, upon an unsuspecting earth.

It was upon a sunny June morning, when the scents of early summer languorously filled the air, and the placid buzzing of a bee outside my window came to my ears above the hubbub of the street traffic below, that the first inkling of the horror came to me—through the columns of my morning newspaper:

SOLID SHADOWS
FALL ON LONDON;
MYSTIFY SAVANTS

LONDON, June 6—Meteorologists, astronomers and scientists confess themselves completely mystified by unique shadow formations, which fell over London yesterday.

The peculiarity lies in the fact that the shadows appear to possess depth, in place of the flatness of an ordinary shadow; that is, they are patches of darkness, not only lying upon the ground or on whatever surface they fall, but rising upward from it for a height of several feet, as though they were solid substances.

There was considerably more to the dispatches, detailing the prevalence of the shadows throughout the English capital. Apparently they had first been observed in Trafalgar Square, near Nelson's monument, and had spread thence until by evening virtually the whole city was knee-deep in the mysterious "solid shadows."

Each shadow was described as being nearly one hundred yards in length, several yards in width and rising from the surface on which it fell, for several feet. They were irregular and indistinct in outline, but all were practically identical in general shape and size. *And in no case was any actual object visible which might have cast such a shadow.*

There were also interviews with a num-

ber of scientists, who confessed themselves unable to explain the phenomenon. Some spoke vaguely of some atmospheric abnormality which might produce such an eccentric obscuration of the sunlight; some tried—rather feebly, I thought—to trace a connection with a recent outbreak of sun spots; and some inclined to the view that the "shadows" were some unusual fog formation, although June is far removed from London's foggy season, and the weather had been warm and dry.

The phenomenon was of only passing interest to me, although it occurred to me as I finished reading, that Parfitt—Roger Middleton Parfitt, former professor of astronomy and physics in Columbia University, and now engaged in private research—would find in it an irresistible challenge, and that he would be capable of plucking the heart from its mystery, if any man were.

In that I was all too correct, as subsequent events established. Meanwhile, however, the matter escaped my mind until twelve hours later, when a flaring

"In the wake of that annihilation had come swiftly and inevitably an inferno of chaos."

black headline in an evening newspaper, caught my eye:

PANIC SPREADS AS MYSTERY SHADOWS SHROUD ALL EUROPE

Beneath were dispatches telling of the appearance of the mysterious shadows in practically every country of Europe, as well as over the whole of the British Isles. They had risen like a tide of darkness over every capital, every city of any magnitude, and thousands of smaller communities. Panics were reported in several rural sections of France, Italy and the Balkan nations, where the populace had been terror-stricken by the phenomenon.

In some places, the shadows had become visible with the first rays of sunrise; in others they had fallen at intervals during the day. In every case, however, they were motionless, and identical in size and outline with those which had first appeared in London. And as before, nothing was visible which might have caused them.

There were columns of interviews now, with practically everyone whom the press could by any stretch of the imagination term "scientists," although I looked in vain for any statement from Parfitt. And the majority of the interviews were meaningless, for everyone admitted inability to fathom the mystery. The theories of "air streaks," sun spots and fog were all rethreshed. One eminent physicist advanced the possibility of the earth's having passed through the gaseous tail of some other astral body, and of patches of the vapor having clung to it. Another anonymous authority pinned his faith to some mysterious, sunlight-repelling rays emanating from within the earth. Another commentator ventured the argument that the sun's heat was dying out, and that this in some unexplained manner produced the phenomenon. Even more fantastic was the suggestion—possibly the product of a newspaperman's imagination—that the shadows were caused by a fleet of airplanes, constructed of some invisible material; a theory which, apart from its extravagant improbability, offered no explanation of the so-called solidity of the shadows, which was their peculiarity.

The thing was of increasing, but still only casual, interest to me—bue next morning the ominous shadow bands fell upon North America.

DREAMS in which intangible things clutched at me like a nebula of doom had broken my sleep, and I awoke slowly, to a vague consciousness of oppression, which was more physical than mental. I naturally set the sensation down to the effect of my dreams; and then, as the last mists of slumber cleared from my mind, I suddenly stared aghast.

The clean, clear sunlight streamed through the upper half of my bedroom window, but the lower half was obscured as though by a volume of black mist, which crept across the floor, up the side of my bed, and lay full across my chest, terminating on the inner wall of the room.

I raised myself in bed and stared at the puzzling obscuration. It was just as described in the cabled reports: an apparent shadow formation, which possessed volume, instead of mere surface area. Its outline was at once vague and yet clearly defined; that is, I could not distinguish its actual shape, but I could see clearly that it was a coherent formation, divided distinctly from, and not merging gradually with, the sunlight above it.

It was black and opaque, like an ordinary shadow falling upon an ordinary surface. I thrust my hand into it, and saw that it was partly obscured, but still visible, just as though I had laid it upon the surface of an ordinary shadow.

Whatever might be the explanation of

the phenomenon, I was satisfied already that it could not be that of fog. My hand encountered no sensation of dampness, or of cold or warmth; and no fog could retain such coherent form in such juxtaposition to clear morning sunlight.

I crossed from my bed to the window, and gazed outside. The formation appeared to bend at right angles, like a stove-pipe elbow. It lay like the trunk of a tree, against the outer wall of the building, and at the street level ran across the road. Whatever caused it, had it been a normal shadow, should have been visible over the roof of the apartment house opposite; but nothing which could have accounted for it met my eyes.

Now for the first time I became conscious that the nebulous formation which had entered my room was but one of a multitude. Similar solid black streaks crossed and recrossed the street at frequent intervals. Some lay across the roofs of buildings, and others climbed their walls. Ordinary shadows were visible on the street, also, and beside them the other formations appeared like bloated monstrosities from some nether world.

Even as I finished dressing, the newsboys in the streets below were crying the first extra editions of the afternoon newspapers, which were almost inarticulate in their efforts to broadcast the phenomenon. For the shadows had fallen, not only over the whole of New York, but over almost every other center in the eastern half of North America; and, as the day progressed, they swept westward in pace with the progress of the sun.

STILL struggling against the vague forebodings which clutched at my mind, I hastened to the penthouse laboratory which Parfitt occupied, on the roof of a skyscraper near the water's edge. I found my friend wan-eyed, at a desk littered, as was the floor for yards about, with paper, scribbled with unintelligible mathematical formulæ.

"Parfitt," I exclaimed, almost in the moment that I opened the door, "what on earth do these shadows mean?"

"Hello, Farquhar," Parfitt rejoined in peculiarly listless tones. "As for your question, the only answer I can give you, with all civility, is that it's none of your business."

"I'm sorry if I've intruded," I apologized somewhat stiffly. "But you might at least have asked me a little more politely to get out."

"Sit down," my friend urged. "I assure you, I had no intention of being discourteous."

"I can see you've been rather busy," I conceded.

"Since six o'clock last evening, without food or sleep," he replied casually.

"On—this thing?" I inquired.

"On it—or at least skirting the fringe of it, as near as the human brain can come to the heart of it," Parfitt answered.

"Then you know, or suspect, the cause?"

"Yes," he replied. "It isn't the cause that's the problem; it's the effect—and the remedy—that are beyond us."

"Then what on earth is it?" I insisted.

"It is probably nothing on earth—in the sense that we are on earth," my friend rejoined.

"You're not suggesting that it is a supernatural manifestation of some kind?" I ejaculated.

"Supernatural—I don't know," the astronomer confessed. "It's certainly supernormal, at least. I told you a few moments ago it was none of your business, Farquhar. I'll take that back. You're a man of sound nerves, and of better than average intelligence; perhaps the truth won't alarm you. The fact is that we are

witnessing for the first time, I think, in human history, an active manifestation from the fourth dimension."

"Just what do you mean by the fourth dimension?" I demanded.

"That I don't know," Parfitt admitted. "We haven't got much nearer an understanding of it, since Einstein propounded his theory, nearly fifty years ago—back in the first quarter of the Twentieth Century. But the scientific world has come to accept, almost as it accepts that two and two always make four, which might be difficult of proof—that there is a fourth dimension; and very possibly a fifth, and perhaps many more."

"But what have these shadows to do with the fourth dimension?" I persisted.

"Isn't it obvious?" my companion countered. "Of course, we have lived so long in a three-dimensional world that it is difficult to conceive of any other. For instance—can you conceive of a two-dimensional object?"

"In theory, certainly," I replied. "As a concrete object, it is more difficult. Even a sheet of paper, of course, has three dimensions. It is hard to visualize an object of only two."

"What about—a shadow?" my companion suggested.

Now, for the first time, a glimmering of the truth dawned upon my mind.

"A shadow, I grant you, has no thickness," I admitted. "In that sense it is two-dimensional. But it is not an object; it is merely the absence of direct light upon a surface."

"True," Parfitt nodded. "A shadow is not an object. It is, we might say, a reflection—but it is the reflection of a three-dimensional object.

"Now today, the greater part of the world's surface, probably, is dotted with shadows which have, apparently, three dimensions, instead of two. Is the inference not inescapable? A two-dimensional shadow, a three-dimensional object; a three-dimensional shadow, a four-dimensional object."

"But, good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What do they mean? And what causes them?"

"Your first question, no one can answer," Parfitt replied. "Perhaps it is as well. Your second, I thought I had answered; they are caused by objects or beings, in the fourth dimension."

"But where are those objects, or beings?" I demurred. "If we can see the shadows, why not the original? They must be close at hand, to produce the shadows."

"Again, perhaps it is as well that we can not see them," my companion murmured. "But it is quite possible that the original objects may be near at hand, and yet invisible to us. I do not imply that they are transparent, or anything of that nature, for if so, they would cast little or no shadow. Yet they may be quite near, and yet beyond our range of vision.

"By way of example, take the two-dimensional conception once more. Imagine, if you can, a sentient creature, of two dimensions, living on a surface of two dimensions. It is difficult to conceive, in reality, of such a thing; but, for the sake of argument, let us assume it.

"That creature would be conscious only of two dimensions—let us say, those of length and width. Of height he would have no conception. He might grasp vaguely at the possibility of a third dimension, just as we do of a fourth, but would be unable to visualize it. An object a fraction of an inch above him would be absolutely invisible to him—absolutely beyond his range of vision. Yet he could see a shadow cast by that object upon his surface world.

"Therefore the objects causing these

shadows may be very near and yet beyond our range of vision. On the other hand, they may be distant, not in space, but in time. We know that there is a relation between space and time, in the fourth dimension; therefore, these shadows may come from the past or from the future—much more probably from the future, since there has never been a similar known phenomenon in the past."

By now my brain was reeling with the utter strangeness of the conception which Parfitt's words unfolded. At first I would almost have termed it incredible; and then gradually came the conviction that his theory not only might be possible, but must almost inevitably be the truth.

"And what are the fourth-dimensional objects?" I asked. "Are they animate or inanimate, human, or what?"

"No one can say, as yet," Parfitt answered. "My own impression is that they are probably animate. Such a sudden manifestation, in such numerical strength, seems to indicate a deliberate intent. That they are human, judged by any of our standards, I gravely doubt."

"The shadows are motionless, except that they move in conformity with the movement of the sun," I pointed out. "That might indicate that they are caused by inanimate objects."

"Not necessarily," Parfitt replied. "A period of twenty-four hours may be but a moment in the fourth dimension."

"How do you know that the fourth-dimensional world is inhabited?" I questioned him.

"Mainly by inference," my companion rejoined. "Since the three-dimensional world is inhabited, surely it follows that the four-dimensional world—necessarily a much more complex universe—is, also."

"And by what sort of creatures?"

"No one can say, but probably by beings very different from the human race. For example, return for a moment to the two-dimensional being which we hypothesized a few moments ago. Imagine what incredible, what incomprehensive monsters we beings of three dimensions must be to him; and the four-dimensional creatures may—in fact, almost certainly would—be equally so to us."

"This is an alarming theory of yours, Parfitt," I gasped. "Imagine the sensation the newspapers would make of it."

"They must never hear of it—unless developments render it absolutely imperative," the scientist declared.

"But what is the meaning of this manifestation?"

Parfitt replied with a weary shrug of the shoulders.

"That is beyond all human conjecture," he confessed. "We have no standard by which to judge it; it is unprecedented in human history. I trust it may prove a friendly one, but, I confess, I have grave misgivings."

"Still more alarming!" I exclaimed. "If it is hostile——"

"If it is hostile," Parfitt replied solemnly, "the world is facing the most deadly peril of its existence. Can you picture the consequences—the physical world which we know utterly at the mercy of creatures which we can not even see, of whose nature and powers we are in utter ignorance?

"It's a conception too horrible to be faced, Farquhar—and yet it may have to be. That's why I'm pledging you to secrecy. The very suggestion of such a thing might mean madness to the world; and the reality might mean far worse. I've been toiling all night, trying to find a solution, to evolve a formula which would make the fourth dimension visible to our eyes; but all in vain, and perhaps as well, too, for God alone knows what vista of unspeakable horror it might unfold.

"Do you realize, Farquhar, that within the shades of the fourth dimension may lurk all the obscene monstrosities with which the mind of man has peopled the unseen world—all those, and perhaps worse? Suppose that all the hideous deities of a score of pagan mythologies had actual, living prototypes—and there's no proof that they hadn't; the weight of evidence is rather in the other direction, for it isn't logical that the mind of man should conjure such saprophytic blasphemies out of nothing.

"The ancient Egyptians weren't fools, nor the immeasurably more ancient Atlanteans; they had a clearer perception of worlds unseen than we of today, whose eyes are dazzled by the feeble rays of rudimentary, material science. Mankind, in every generation since the mind first functioned, has sensed the actual existence of occult powers of awful potentiality. Sorcerers and demonologists, so called, have trafficked with those powers in every age.

"I'm not an alarmist, Farquhar; I hope and pray that what I've just pictured may not be the truth; but we are confronted, in the words of Grover Cleveland, with a condition, and not a theory. Thus far, I grant you, the shadows have done no harm; they may not do any harm, but some unfathomable purpose must lie beyond their sudden appearance."

PARFITT had no need to caution me to keep so soul-searing a secret; but even without that knowledge, the world that evening lay beneath a pall of apprehension.

By sunset, the shadows had made their appearance on practically every section of the globe. They lay aslant the Rockies, the Andes, and the Himalayas; they traversed the surface of the Sahara Desert, and darkened the midsummer snows as far north as Herschel Island, within the Arctic Circle. They fell alike on the African veldt and the Australian bush, and even spread their inexplicable lengths upon the waters of the seven seas.

The phenomenon was the feature of the day in the evening newspapers. Cable and telegraphic dispatches from every continent told of its manifestations, and speculated vainly as to the cause. There were reports of panics in half a dozen countries, and as I read them, I realized, more even than before, the necessity for the secrecy which Parfitt had impressed upon me. If the mere appearance of the shadows had power to rouse such alarm in human breasts, to what abysses of madness and despair might a realization of what they really portended lead?

In the Transylvania region of Rumania, peasants by thousands had fled from the fields, proclaiming that the end of the world was at hand. Many had fired their homes, and military forces were on guard in half a dozen centers against possible outbreaks of terrorism or sabotage.

In France and Austria also, the peasants were flocking to the cities, although in more orderly manner. From China and Tibet came word of weird rites performed in Buddhist temples and monasteries. In India, scores of natives hurled themselves into the Ganges, and from the interior of Africa came ominous rumors of human sacrifices offered up to strange and almost forgotten tribal gods.

There were other demonstrations of alarm in the Latin-American republics, and in some sections of England and the United States also. Both scientists and government officials, however, published assurances that there was no cause for alarm in the situation. While admitting their inability to explain the shadows, they insisted that these must be of some natural origin, and that there was no reason to believe that they portended disaster of any nature.

Experiments conducted in a dozen different centers, in an effort to determine the nature and cause of the shadows, brought no results but negative ones, which resulted in the shattering of most of the theories previously advanced. Scientists satisfied themselves that the phenomenon was not produced by fog, mist or emanations of any known ray or radio-active disturbance; nor could any abnormal conditions be detected in the atmosphere.

It is the natural tendency of the human mind, however, to shrink always from the unknown, and all assurances as to the non-existence of danger failed to allay a growing sense of disquietude. Nightfall, bringing with it the obliteration of the shadows, came as a welcome temporary respite; for to many, ostrich-like, it appeared that since the shadows were no longer visible, they were no longer in existence.

One point impressed itself upon me that night—namely, that no three-dimension shadows were cast by electric lights or other forms of artificial illumination. I could not bring myself to believe that the silent watchers from the unseen world had actually departed with the coming of darkness; therefore, I reasoned, they were probably beyond the radius of man's artificial luminances.

Next morning, however, the shadows were in evidence once more in identically the same positions as twenty-four hours earlier, which would have strengthened my belief that they were caused by inanimate objects, were it not for Parfitt's assurance that time, as measured in our world, might be a negligible element in the realm of the fourth dimension.

And now came swift and sudden confirmation of his prediction; for a cable, received in New York at ten a.m., brought tidings which struck fresh dread to human hearts throughout the world.

The shadows were in motion, in London—"advancing like a phantom legion upon the city," as one writer, who had unwittingly plumbed nearer to the truth than he realized, phrased it.

Like sinuous serpents, they were gliding silently, but therefore the more ominously, over the capital of the British empire. The movement was not co-ordinated, or in unison; the shadows drifted in various directions, as though each were indeed the reflection of a conscious entity. Within an hour, every surface in London, whether vertical or horizontal, was a-shimmer with the creeping black patches, which frequently crossed and blended together, like rivulets converging in a common stream.

They writhed in sinister silence alike across the historic pavement of Whitehall and through the most leprous lanes of Limehouse; tossed upon the surface of the Thames as it lapped at the wharves of Wapping, circled the mighty dome of St. Paul's and scaled the walls of Buckingham Palace, where the octogenarian monarch, Edward VIII, had died three months before, and where his niece Elizabeth today reigned, as had another queen of that name four centuries before.

And now, many observers claimed to discern in the outline of the moving shadows a grotesque, but still visible, resemblance to the human form. Magnified and distorted though they were, their manner of movement was roughly comparable to the stride of a bipedal being; and occasionally, from the main bulk of the blackness, a pseudopod-like length of shade swung suddenly out, as might an arm attached to a body. Other onlookers disputed the resemblance and set it down as mere imagination, inspired by the fact that the shadows were moving.

The wave of apprehension which had swept the world in the preceding forty-eight hours now clutched more firmly at

London's heart. The venerable prime ministress, Dame Megan Lloyd George, issued a proclamation in which she counseled the nation against alarm or hysteria; but the unrest spread, particularly among the Oriental colonies of the east end, where there were violent outbreaks of suicide, mutilation and unnamable rites and orgies.

I SOUGHT Parfitt out that night, and found him as though he had not moved from his desk in the last thirty-six hours. He was more wan and haggard than on the preceding day, and the litter of paper now carpeted the entire room.

"It's no use, Farquhar," he groaned. "I've tried every known formula and angle, and developed a dozen new ones, but they all fall short. The damnable thing seems to hover illusively, maddeningly, just beyond my reach, just round the corner from human eyesight and human understanding. If I could only turn that corner——"

"You're overdoing this task, Parfitt," I cautioned him. "I don't know just what you're groping for——"

"Nor do I," he exclaimed. "That's the agony of it. 'Groping' is the word—groping into blackness more unfathomable than those damned shadows. What I'm seeking is some channel of communication with the unseen world—some means of peering into the fourth dimension and seeing what all this means. But I fear it's futile. As I said yesterday, our two-dimensional man, with his two-dimensional brain, couldn't be expected to visualize the actual nature of the third dimension; and we, I suppose, are limited in turn, in our powers of perception."

"Of course you have seen today's cables——" I ventured.

"Yes, and talked for an hour to Greenwich observatory," Parfitt replied.

"Does this strengthen your belief that the shadows are those of living creatures?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, "although I had little doubt of it before. Therefore, to that extent, there is nothing additionally alarming in the fact of their being in motion. But there's no doubt that they are spreading panic; and if the mere shadows do that, what will the actual substance do?"

"What do you suggest?"

"I don't know—I'm not sure that I want to know, though I've been toiling for days to do so. And it is more than possible that no one may ever know. I haven't the faintest conception whether the fourth-dimension creatures are human, beast or spirit—although presumably not the latter, since they cast shadows. Of what their coming may mean, I have an idea—one that I dare not divulge, one that it would be futile to divulge; for if it is wrong, it is far better that it never be known; and if it is right, no human power could avert what I fear."

Next morning, the shadows were in motion throughout Europe, and in the late afternoon they commenced to writhe and glide across North America, like the fingers of a giant hand which planned to crush the entire earth within its grasp, as I might crush an egg.

The New World, prepared by the preceding day's tidings from London, gave comparatively little manifestation of increased alarm, although thousands of persons thronged the churches of city, village and countryside, to pray for deliverance from any disaster which might be in store. There were no public services of intercession, however; for the clergy, almost as a unit—and perhaps feigning a confidence which they lacked inwardly, in order to reassure the public—refused to recognize the shadows as a source of even potential peril.

Again the newspapers were filled with columns of fruitless speculation as to the significance of the newest manifestation; but I noted that there was no suggestion even faintly resembling that which, on Parfitt's assurance, I believed to be the truth. Practically all scientists of any repute confessed themselves completely mystified; although some, I believe, by now must have grasped the meaning of the menace, as Parfitt had done, but refrained, as he did, from confiding so soul-searing a secret to the world at large—even though the onrushing culmination of that secret was then only a few hours distant.

At midnight I stood with Parfitt, gazing from his observatory window upon the throbbing city's night life, far below, where millions pursued the path of pleasure, either heedless of the shadow menace, or else seeking forgetfulness. A myriad pinpoints of light outlined faintly the lower thoroughfares along which motor cars sped, and the elevated paths above, reserved for pedestrians. On the right, a luminous aurora rose from Broadway's kaleidoscope. From the distance came the hoarse siren of a steamer somewhere in the sound, and overhead an occasional airplane hovered like a droning firefly.

The very familiarity of the scene seemed, somehow, to reassure me against the nebulous forebodings which had assailed my mind for days. It was impossible to conceive of any serious disaster intruding upon a world so firmly founded as ours.

At that moment, Parfitt was speaking:

"Sir Jason Singleton, director of the Greenwich observatory, is to call me early in the morning—within two or three hours. I sounded him on the subject yesterday, and he appears to have formed the same conclusions as myself. We must watch London, for it is reasonable to assume that future developments will occur there first, as they have in the past."

It was three o'clock in the morning—eight o'clock by Greenwich time—when the call light upon the radiophone apparatus in the laboratory flashed alternately blue and red—London's call signal. Parfitt was at the phone instantly, simultaneously pressing the button which completed the television circuit, so that upon the screen that stood against the wall, I beheld the bearded figure of Sir Jason Singleton, seated at his desk.

Although television has been in practical use for nearly forty years, never have I seen an apparatus which functioned so perfectly as Parfitt's. I could detect every movement of the British astronomer's lips, could almost read the words which they framed, as clearly as though he sat before me in the flesh, instead of being three thousand miles distant.

From Parfitt's words I realized that he and Singleton had exchanged views, and that they were in agreement. Then, as I watched, I became aware that a shapeless black outline—one of the shadows—had stretched serpent-like across the British scientist's desk, apparently penetrating through a window which was beyond the radius of the television apparatus.

Sir Jason had apparently asked what steps could be taken to face the situation, for I heard Parfitt reply:

"What steps are possible? How can we act against a danger, of the very nature of which we are unaware? How can we conjecture when or where or how it will strike——"

And at that instant it struck.

At the recollection of those first few, soul-shattering seconds of horror, I still quiver as I write. For in a twinkling, as I gazed upon the television screen, I be-

held a sudden movement of the shadow-mass on the Englishman's desk. It seemed to coil itself, tentacle-like, about his figure, and in the flashing of an eye Sir Jason Singleton had vanished, as though obliterated by a giant eraser.

Parfitt had seen the thing, even as I had; for as I sprang from my chair with an ejaculation of horror on my lips, he was calling hoarsely into the radiophone:

"Singleton—Singleton! Where are you, man? For God's sake, speak to me—the world's safety depends on it!"

Dazed at the suddenness of what I had beheld, I stared over his shoulder at the television screen. The interior of Sir Jason's office was clearly visible. The chair in which he had sat was unmoved; the radiophone stood upon his desk, the earphones still swaying from whatever force had torn them from Singleton's head. But the scientist himself had vanished, and with him, the shadow.

Now Parfitt was tearing at the dials and switches of the radiophone, in a frenzy that seemed half madness and half despair, still calling incoherently upon Singleton. When he finally thrust the apparatus aside and rose to face me, his face was ashen with the anguish of a man who has read, not alone his own death sentence, but that of a world.

"It's come, Farquhar," he said dully. "I didn't foresee that it would come in this form; but then, who could?"

"In God's name," I ejaculated, "what has happened, and what does it mean?"

"The creatures of the fourth dimension have struck—and it means the world's doom," Parfitt answered. "You saw what happened? Singleton was snatched out of sight, as though by a giant, invisible hand—snatched not only out of sight, but out of all human ken—snatched, in short, into the fourth dimension."

"What will become of him?" I demanded.

"How can we tell?" my companion groaned. "It may be immediate annihilation—some horrible metamorphosis—anything. But it's not Singleton alone. The creatures of the fourth dimension haven't singled out one man for their attack, be assured of that. They may have struck at hundreds—millions! They may have wiped out all England, and may be advancing on us at this very moment—a shadow army that will devour the world."

The contemplation of such a crushing, cosmic catastrophe seemed somehow to chill me less than the sight of Singleton's disappearance had done. It may be that the first shock had numbed my mental consciousness, or it may be that my mind recoiled from the effort to envision a doom so all-devouring as that which Parfitt's words foretold.

"This is what I have vaguely feared since the first appearance of the shadows," my companion went on. "You may say it was my duty to warn the world—but of what use would such a warning have been? What means of defense can we take against such a foe which we can not even see, a foe which reaches out from the infinity of a dimension beyond our ken, to wipe our race from the earth? Even now, when we know how it has struck, when we know that it may strike again at any moment, what can we do?

"We can not flee from the shadows, for they are everywhere—and understand, of course, that it is not the shadows themselves, but the beings which cause them, that are the menace. We might hide from the shadows by immuring ourselves in rooms or caverns where no sunlight could penetrate; but we can not hide from the fourth-dimensional beings themselves. We can not even fortify ourselves against them. They, presumably, can enter a

locked room, through the medium of the fourth dimension, as easily as we could step into a two-dimensional plane through the medium of the third dimension—that is, from above it."

With a sudden gesture of determination he turned again to the radiophone, and for several minutes dialed frenziedly; then he turned to me once more.

"I can't raise London," he said, tonelessly. "Cullinan, Bywater, Hereward-Evans—none of them answers."

A call to the government radio bureau confirmed our worst fears. All wireless communication with London had been mysteriously and abruptly severed, shortly after three a. m.; and simultaneously even the now almost-obsolete undersea cables had suddenly "gone dead." Britain's capital was isolated from the world overseas.

And so, upon an unsuspecting world, the blow which Parfitt, and perhaps others, had foreseen but had been powerless to avert, had fallen.

UPON the numbing agony of the next few hours of darkness, as Parfitt conferred frantically with scientists of three continents, I can not dwell; for already I have lingered too long upon this history, and my labors, futile, probably, in any case, must necessarily be so, unless I complete them before the blow falls here.

All of Parfitt's calls to London were unavailing, but he finally succeeded in communicating with two Scottish physicists, the pallor of whose horror-stricken visages was apparent even on the television screen. And not without reason, for the story which they unfolded to us, across three thousand miles of space, was one of stark, blood-chilling terror, such as human ears had never heard before.

In a word, the city of London, with its twenty million inhabitants, had been wiped clean of human life, so far as outside observations could reveal; and, more, lay at that moment in the grip of a holocaust of destruction more ruthless even than that through which it had passed in the world war of 1947.

There had been no word of warning, not even time for panic; in the twinkling of an eye, apparently, the hovering shadows had snatched twenty million human beings out of visible existence, as though they had been drawn relentlessly into the maw of a gigantic vacuum. From homes and offices and streets and moving vehicles alike, every living soul had been torn, seemingly by ruthless, unseen hands.

And in the wake of that annihilation, the most incredible in human history, had come swiftly and inevitably an inferno of chaos. Motor cars by hundreds of thousands, speeding along thousands of streets, became unguided juggernauts of destruction as the controlling hands vanished from their wheels; they crashed and collided with one another, and spread sheets of flaming gasoline on roadway and sidewalk.

A half-dozen airplanes, left suddenly pilotless in midair over the city, hurtled in flames to earth. Railway trains leaped their tracks and piled masses of tangled steel wreckage on every side. Boilers left untended in a hundred factories burst in belching eruptions of destruction; elevators crashed, and scores of towering structures already lay leveled in ruins. A score of barges ran amok upon the Thames, shattered themselves against its piers or against one another, and vanished beneath its waters.

And, following closely on that deluge of devastation, terror had swept like wildfire throughout the British Isles. In the streets of virtually every town and city, mobs ran rampant; some calling upon all they met to kneel and await the end of

the world in prayer; others proclaiming an orgy of carousal and debauchery; and many seeking the nearest means of self-destruction.

With its royal family and the heads of its government wiped out of existence, the nation lay for the moment as though paralyzed beneath the blow which had struck it. A half-dozen cabinet ministers chanced to be absent from London, however, as Parliament was in the middle of its Whitsuntide recess; and these, under the leadership of Sir Fulford Treleaven, chancellor of the exchequer, summoned an emergency council of state in Liverpool, in a determined effort to face the crisis.

Martial law was proclaimed throughout the country, and every available military unit was mobilized and dispatched to strategic points, in an effort to restore order. Rigid censorship was imposed upon telephones, telegraphs, cables and radiophones; and a manifesto was broadcast, calling upon all to remain calm and to "carry on" with the normal affairs of everyday life. Any exodus of refugees from or to any community was forbidden, for fear that congestion in the larger centers might only result in increased panics, and in food shortages. Preparations were made to commandeer all food supplies and to ration them on a wartime basis, if such a step appeared necessary.

Whatever the nature of the disaster which had obliterated all human life from the nation's capital, the manifesto pointed out, there was no certainty that it would strike at other points; and if it did, there was no known means of meeting it; therefore alarms of any nature could only intensify the gravity of the situation.

Even before these precautions could be put into force, however, virtually every roadway throughout the country was black with streams of refugees, country-dwellers seeking safety in the cities and townspeople hastening to the open spaces.

Thousands who had relatives in London converged upon that metropolis of doom in a frenzied effort to learn the fate of their loved ones. A few entered the city before a military cordon could be thrown about it; entered it, and vanished as had those whom they sought. A venturesome aviator flew over the capital, and his empty plane crashed in a flaming parabola a few minutes later.

Stark, cosmic annihilation had gripped the heart of the British Empire, and no one knew at what moment it might spread throughout the entire world.

"It is probably only a matter of hours, at most," Parfitt assured me. "It was logical that the blow should fall on London first, since the shadows first made their appearance there. It took them thirty-six hours to spread over the world, in the first place; but the interval in which they commenced to move was shorter, and the present interval—the world's last breathing-spell—may prove shorter yet."

It was now only daybreak, but already Parfitt had chartered a special aerocar in which to speed to Washington for a conference with the cabinet.

Never before, in all the world's history, has the sun risen upon such a day as this —the last, in all probability, which human eye shall ever see. The shadows still lay over us, writhing and contorting now like a colossal den of angry serpents; but an even blacker pall of terror and anguish hovered over every heart and mind.

Immediately upon recognizing the extent of the disaster which had overtaken London, the government clapped a ban of censorship upon all radio stations and newspapers throughout the United States; but too late, for already the tidings had spread that London was cut off from the

world, and a score of rumors, all well-nigh as fantastic and alarming as the unguessed truth, ran like wildfire across the continent; and all seized upon the certainty that there was some deadly connection between the shadows and what had followed.

Parfitt and I, as it chanced, had not been the only eye-witnesses in the United States of the striking of the blow. A radiophone operator in one of the morning newspaper offices, who had been in conversation with his bureau in London, was carried semi-conscious from his machine, babbling deliriously of a black cloud which had engulfed the man with whom he was conversing three thousand miles away. Had the thing occurred during the day, hundreds of eyes must have witnessed it on television screens.

By eight o'clock, the streets of downtown New York were jammed with frenzied men and women, demanding to know the truth. Mobs attempted to fight their way into several newspaper offices and radio stations to obtain information, but were repulsed by the police, reinforced by hastily recruited squads of state troopers.

In the city's foreign districts, pandemonium reigned. Thousands of aliens, of a score of races, assembled in raving, inarticulate groups, and alternately prayed and blasphemed. Several persons were trampled to death in a stampede to enter an East Side church; and an aged woman, screaming for news of her two daughters in London, hurled herself from a tenth-story window.

And the developments of every hour piled fresh fuel upon the flames of panic. By nine o'clock, communication with every point in the British Isles was cut off. Some believed it had been severed as a form of censorship, by the British authorities; but I, with the recollection of what we had seen still agonizingly fresh upon me, knew otherwise; knew that the horror was spreading, and that all England, Scotland and Ireland were probably, by now, the same smoldering, lifeless shambles that London had become a few hours earlier.

At ten o'clock, Paris failed to respond to the signals of the world; and a few minutes later, sudden, ominous silence cut short radio messages from two steamers and a transatlantic air liner.

At noon, Parfitt returned from Washington, after a two-hour conference with the cabinet, in which he had convinced them of the actual nature of the fate which lies before us, and had offered what suggestions he could—not as to averting the inevitable, but as to the most advisable means of facing it.

And an hour later the President of the United States delivered by radio the most momentous message ever addressed by the chief executive to the nation.

It seemed to me that he had aged ten years in as many hours, as I beheld his face, sunken, set and careworn, on the television screen; seamed, not with personal fear, but with the appalling realization of what lay before his nation and the world.

"Citizens of the United States," his voice came with forced calmness, "the world is faced today with a danger which has never arisen in its history before.

"What that danger is, exactly, we do not know. It is a manifestation beyond human understanding. But it has apparently destroyed all human life in the British Isles, and in other parts of the world. There is grave reason to fear that it may do the same here.

"It is beyond human power to avert the disaster. If it comes, it will come. If we are spared, it will be by the will of God. But nothing can be gained, and much un-

necessary suffering can be caused, by needless panic. In an hour of crisis such as the world has never faced before, my plea to you is—be calm.

"If death comes, there is every reason to believe that it will be instantaneous and painless; a more merciful death than most of us could anticipate in the ordinary course of nature. We can not flee from it; we can best await it in calmness, committing our souls to our Maker, and bearing in mind that 'Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant only taste of death but once'."

NEW YORK is as a city of living dead, as I complete these pages. By government decree, transportation and industry have been halted, in an effort at least to avert the chaotic destruction which followed the snuffing out of human life in London—and presumably throughout the Old World; for in the last few hours we have been unable to communicate with any point outside North America.

Not a factory wheel is turning throughout the United States; not an airplane, train or motor car is in motion; every possible fire has been extinguished. Scarcely a footfall sounds upon the streets, for everyone is within his home, in obedience to the president's plea. The panic-stricken mobs have at last been dispersed, and the stillness of the tomb broods already over the city and the nation.

What purpose these precautions can serve is admittedly uncertain; for if man is to vanish from the earth, what matter whether the walls and towers of this mechanical civilization are unimpaired? At least we have done what we can.

I am making six copies of this document, upon parchment, chemically treated to render it more durable. These I shall enclose in hermetically sealed cylinders of ferro-aluminum; and these cylinders I shall set afloat in the river, if indeed time remains. And thus a record of man's last days upon earth, and of the nature of the end of his reign, may be preserved, for what eyes I know not, to read upon what distant shore I know not.

Upon my desk, and upon the floor, upon the city outside and over all the world, so far as I know, the shadows still writhe as I cease to write. The sun is sinking in an arc of crimson beauty, and with it, the sun of mankind. A faint breeze rustles in the trees, and brings the scents of early summer to my window.

Oh, God, it would be sweet to live!

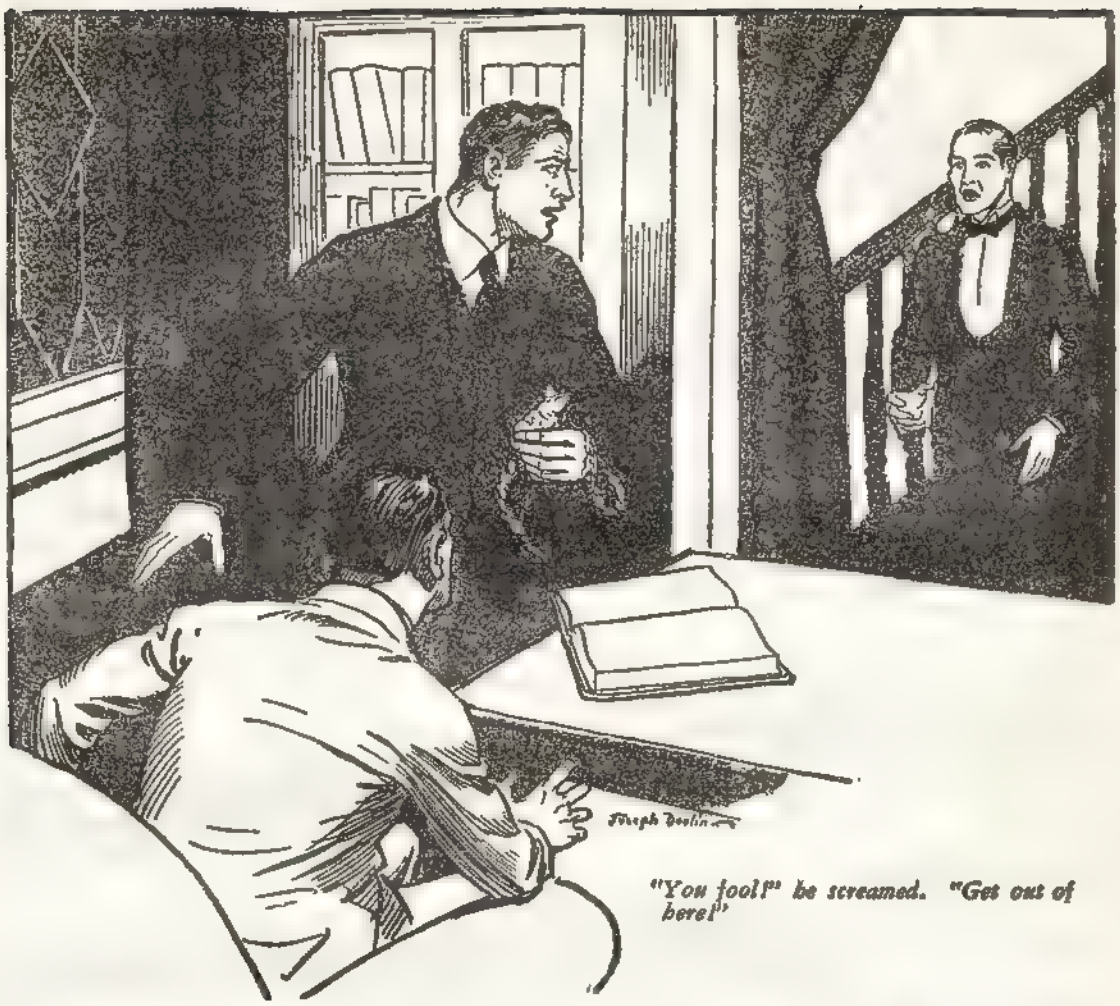
EPILOGUE

(By Quarus Nahal, official astronomer-historian of the planet Mars)

THE voyage to the planet Terrestria, successfully completed last year by the Martian research expedition, confirms the opinion of our scientists that there is no animate life upon that planet, nor has been for centuries.

The expedition, however, uncovered highly interesting — if authentic — evidence that a race of beings of some culture and civilization may once have populated Terrestria. Charred and crumbling ruins of stone and metallic structures, which may once have been the dwelling-places of such beings, were noted; and enclosed in a hermetically sealed cylinder was a document, of which the foregoing is an approximate translation—a translation completed only after twelve months of arduous study, since the document is written in a language and an alphabet entirely foreign to any known here.

Whether this chronicle actually portrays the manner in which life was wiped from the planet must remain in doubt; but the context of the translation is at least consistent with the circumstances under which the document was found.



"You fool!" he screamed. "Get out of here!"

The Thing on the Roof

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A shuddery tale of an old, legend-haunted tomb in Honduras, and the doom that pursued the man who opened it

They lumber through the night
  With their elephantine tread;
I shudder in affright
  As I cower in my bed.
They lift colossal wings
  On the high gable roofs
Which tremble to the trample
  Of their mastodonic hoofs.
—Justin Geoffrey: *Out of the Old Land.*

LET me begin by saying that I was surprized when Tussmann called on me. We had never been close friends; the man's mercenary instincts repelled me; and since our bitter controversy of three years before, when he attempted to discredit my *Evidences of Nahua Culture in Yucatan,* which was the result of years of careful research, our relations had been anything but cordial. However, I received him and found his manner nasty and abrupt, but rather abstracted, as if his dislike for me had been thrust aside in some driving passion that had hold of him.

His errand was quickly stated. He

wished my aid in obtaining a volume in the first edition of Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults*—the edition known as the Black Book, not from its color, but because of its dark contents. He might almost as well have asked me for the original Greek translation of the *Necronomicon*. Though since my return from Yucatan I had devoted practically all my time to my avocation of book collecting, I had not stumbled on to any hint that the book in the Düsseldorf edition was still in existence.

A word as to this rare work. Its extreme ambiguity in spots, coupled with its incredible subject matter, has caused it long to be regarded as the ravings of a maniac and the author was damned with the brand of insanity. But the fact remains that much of his assertions are unanswerable, and that he spent the full forty-five years of his life prying into strange places and discovering secret and abysmal things. Not a great many volumes were printed in the first edition and many of these were burned by their frightened owners when Von Junzt was found strangled in a mysterious manner, in his barred and bolted chamber one night in 1840, six months after he had returned from a mysterious journey to Mongolia.

Five years later a London printer, one Bridewall, pirated the work, and issued a cheap translation for sensational effect, full of grotesque wood-cuts, and riddled with misspellings, faulty translations and the usual errors of a cheap and unscholarly printing. This still further discredited the original work, and publishers and public forgot about the book until 1909 when the Golden Goblin Press of New York brought out an edition.

Their production was so carefully expurgated that fully a fourth of the original matter was cut out; the book was handsomely bound and decorated with the exquisite and weirdly imaginative illustrations of Diego Vasquez. The edition was intended for popular consumption but the artistic instinct of the publishers defeated that end, since the cost of issuing the book was so great that they were forced to cite it at a prohibitive price.

I was explaining all this to Tussmann when he interrupted bruskly to say that he was not utterly ignorant in such matters. One of the Golden Goblin books ornamented his library, he said, and it was in it that he found a certain line which aroused his interest. If I could procure him a copy of the original 1839 edition, he would make it worth my while; knowing, he added, that it would be useless to offer me money, he would, instead, in return for my trouble in his behalf, make a full retraction of his former accusations in regard to my Yucatan researches, and offer a complete apology in *The Scientific News*.

I will admit that I was astounded at this, and realized that if the matter meant so much to Tussmann that he was willing to make such concessions, it must indeed be of the utmost importance. I answered that I considered that I had sufficiently refuted his charges in the eyes of the world and had no desire to put him in a humiliating position, but that I would make the utmost efforts to procure him what he wanted.

He thanked me abruptly and took his leave, saying rather vaguely that he hoped to find a complete exposition of something in the Black Book which had evidently been slighted in the later edition.

I SET to work, writing letters to friends, colleagues and book-dealers all over the world, and soon discovered that I had assumed a task of no small magnitude. Three months elapsed before my efforts were crowned with success, but at last, through the aid of Professor James Clem-

ent of Richmond, Virginia, I was able to obtain what I wished.

I notified Tussmann and he came to London by the next train. His eyes burned avidly as he gazed at the thick, dusty volume with its heavy leather covers and rusty iron hasps, and his fingers quivered with eagerness as he thumbed the time-yellowed pages.

And when he cried out fiercely and smashed his clenched fist down on the table I knew that he had found what he hunted.

"Listen!" he commanded, and he read to me a passage that spoke of an old, old temple in a Honduras jungle where a strange god was worshipped by an ancient tribe which became extinct before the coming of the Spaniards. And Tussmann read aloud of the mummy that had been, in life, the last high priest of that vanished people, and which now lay in a chamber hewn in the solid rock of the cliff against which the temple was built. About that mummy's withered neck was a copper chain, and on that chain a great red jewel carved in the form of a toad. This jewel was a key, Von Junzt went on to say, to the treasure of the temple which lay hidden in a subterranean crypt far below the temple's altar.

Tussmann's eyes blazed.

"I have seen that temple! I have stood before the altar. I have seen the sealed-up entrance of the chamber in which, the natives say, lies the mummy of the priest. It is a very curious temple, no more like the ruins of the prehistoric Indians than it is like the buildings of the modern Latin-Americans. The Indians in the vicinity disclaim any former connection with the place; they say that the people who built that temple were a different race from themselves, and were there when their own ancestors came into the country. I believe it to be a remnant of some long-vanished civilization which began to decay thousands of years before the Spaniards came.

"I would have liked to have broken into the sealed-up chamber, but I had neither the time nor the tools for the task. I was hurrying to the coast, having been wounded by an accidental gunshot in the foot, and I stumbled on to the place purely by chance.

"I have been planning to have another look at it, but circumstances have prevented—now I intend to let nothing stand in my way! By chance I came upon a passage in the Golden Goblin edition of this book, describing the temple. But that was all; the mummy was only briefly mentioned. Interested, I obtained one of Bridewall's translations but ran up against a blank wall of baffling blunders. By some irritating mischance the translator had even mistaken the location of the Temple of the Toad, as Von Junzt calls it, and has it in Guatemala instead of Honduras. The general description is faulty, but the jewel is mentioned and the fact that it is a 'key'. But a key to what, Bridewall's book does not state. I now felt that I was on the track of a real discovery, unless Von Junzt was, as many maintain, a madman. But that the man was actually in Honduras at one time is well attested, and no one could so vividly describe the temple—as he does in the Black Book—unless he had seen it himself. How he learned of the jewel is more than I can say. The Indians who told me of the mummy said nothing of any jewel. I can only believe that Von Junzt found his way into the sealed crypt somehow—the man had uncanny ways of learning hidden things.

"To the best of my knowledge only one other white man has seen the Temple of the Toad besides Von Junzt and myself—the Spanish traveller Juan Gonzal-

les, who made a partial exploration of that country in 1793. He mentioned, briefly, a curious fane that differed from most Indian ruins, and spoke skeptically of a legend current among the natives that there was 'something unusual' hidden under the temple. I feel certain that he was referring to the Temple of the Toad.

"Tomorrow I sail for Central America. Keep the book; I have no more use for it. This time I am going fully prepared and I intend to find what is hidden in that temple, if I have to demolish it. It can be nothing less than a great store of gold! The Spaniards missed it, somehow; when they arrived in Central America, the Temple of the Toad was deserted; they were searching for living Indians from whom torture could wring gold; not for mummies of lost peoples. But I mean to have that treasure."

So saying Tussmann took his departure. I sat down and opened the book at the place where he had left off reading, and I sat until midnight, wrapt in Von Junzt's curious, wild and at times utterly vague expoundings. And I found pertaining to the Temple of the Toad certain things which disquieted me so much that the next morning I attempted to get in touch with Tussmann, only to find that he had already sailed.

SEVERAL months passed and then I received a letter from Tussmann, asking me to come and spend a few days with him at his estate in Sussex; he also requested me to bring the Black Book with me.

I arrived at Tussmann's rather isolated estate just after nightfall. He lived in almost feudal state, his great ivy-grown house and broad lawns surrounded by high stone walls. As I went up the hedge-bordered way from the gate to the house, I noted that the place had not been well kept in its master's absence. Weeds grew rank among the trees, almost choking out the grass. Among some unkempt bushes over against the outer wall, I heard what appeared to be a horse or an ox blundering and lumbering about. I distinctly heard the clink of its hoof on a stone.

A servant who eyed me suspiciously admitted me and I found Tussmann pacing to and fro in his study like a caged lion. His giant frame was leaner, harder than when I had last seen him; his face was bronzed by a tropic sun. There were more and harsher lines in his strong face and his eyes burned more intensely than ever. A smoldering, baffled anger seemed to underlie his manner.

"Well, Tussmann," I greeted him, "what success? Did you find the gold?"

"I found not an ounce of gold," he growled. "The whole thing was a hoax—well, not all of it. I broke into the sealed chamber and found the mummy——"

"And the jewel?" I exclaimed.

He drew something from his pocket and handed it to me.

I gazed curiously at the thing I held. It was a great jewel, clear and transparent as crystal, but of a sinister crimson, carved, as Von Junzt had declared, in the shape of a toad. I shuddered involuntarily; the image was peculiarly repulsive. I turned my attention to the heavy and curiously wrought copper chain which supported it.

"What are these characters carved on the chain?" I asked curiously.

"I can not say," Tussmann replied. "I had thought perhaps you might know. I find a faint resemblance between them and certain partly defaced hieroglyphics on a monolith known as the Black Stone in the mountains of Hungary. I have been unable to decipher them."

"Tell me of your trip," I urged, and

over our whisky-and-sodas he began, as if with a strange reluctance.

"I found the temple again with no great difficulty, though it lies in a lonely and little-frequented region. The temple is built against a sheer stone cliff in a deserted valley unknown to maps and explorers. I would not endeavor to make an estimate of its antiquity, but it is built of a sort of unusually hard basalt, such as I have never seen anywhere else, and its extreme weathering suggests incredible age.

"Most of the columns which form its façade are in ruins, thrusting up shattered stumps from worn bases, like the scattered and broken teeth of some grinning hag. The outer walls are crumbling, but the inner walls and the columns which support such of the roof as remains intact, seem good for another thousand years, as well as the walls of the inner chamber.

"The main chamber is a large circular affair with a floor composed of great squares of stone. In the center stands the altar, merely a huge, round, curiously carved block of the same material. Directly behind the altar, in the solid stone cliff which forms the rear wall of the chamber, is the sealed and hewn-out chamber wherein lay the mummy of the temple's last priest.

"I broke into the crypt with not too much difficulty and found the mummy exactly as is stated in the Black Book. Though it was in a remarkable state of preservation, I was unable to classify it. The withered features and general contour of the skull suggested certain degraded and mongrel peoples of lower Egypt, and I feel certain that the priest was a member of a race more akin to the Caucasian than the Indian. Beyond this, I can not make any positive statement.

"But the jewel was there, the chain looped about the dried-up neck."

From this point Tussmann's narrative became so vague that I had some difficulty in following him and wondered if the tropic sun had affected his mind. He had opened a hidden door in the altar somehow with the jewel—just how, he did not plainly say, and it struck me that he did not clearly understand himself the action of the jewel-key. But the opening of the secret door had had a bad effect on the hardy rogues in his employ. They had refused point-blank to follow him through that gaping black opening which had appeared so mysteriously when the gem was touched to the altar.

Tussmann entered alone with his pistol and electric torch, finding a narrow stone stair that wound down into the bowels of the earth, apparently. He followed this and presently came into a broad corridor, in the blackness of which his tiny beam of light was almost engulfed. As he told this he spoke with strange annoyance of a toad which hopped ahead of him, just beyond the circle of light, all the time he was below ground.

Making his way along dank tunnels and stairways that were wells of solid blackness, he at last came to a heavy door fantastically carved, which he felt must be the crypt wherein was secreted the gold of the ancient worshippers. He pressed the toad-jewel against it at several places and finally the door gaped wide.

"And the treasure?" I broke in eagerly.

He laughed in savage self-mockery.

"There was no gold there, no precious gems—nothing"—he hesitated—"nothing that I could bring away."

Again his tale lapsed into vagueness. I gathered that he had left the temple rather hurriedly without searching any further for the supposed treasure. He had intended bringing the mummy away with him, he said, to present to some museum, but when he came up out of the pits, it

could not be found and he believed that his men, in superstitious aversion to having such a companion on their road to the coast, had thrown it into some well or cavern.

"And so," he concluded, "I am in England again no richer than when I left."

"You have the jewel," I reminded him. "Surely it is valuable."

He eyed it without favor, but with a sort of fierce avidness almost obsessional.

"Would you say that it is a ruby?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I am unable to classify it."

"And I. But let me see the book."

HE SLOWLY turned the heavy pages, his lips moving as he read. Sometimes he shook his head as if puzzled, and I noticed him dwell long over a certain line.

"This man dipped so deeply into forbidden things," said he, "I can not wonder that his fate was so strange and mysterious. He must have had some foreboding of his end—here he warns men not to disturb sleeping things."

Tussmann seemed lost in thought for some moments.

"Aye, sleeping things," he muttered, "that seem dead, but only lie waiting for some blind fool to awake them—I should have read further in the Black Book—and I should have shut the door when I left the crypt—but I have the key and I'll keep it in spite of hell."

He roused himself from his reveries and was about to speak when he stopped short. From somewhere upstairs had come a peculiar sound.

"What was that?" He glared at me. I shook my head and he ran to the door and shouted for a servant. The man entered a few moments later and he was rather pale.

"You were upstairs?" growled Tussmann.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear anything?" asked Tussmann harshly and in a manner almost threatening and accusing.

"I did, sir," the man answered with a puzzled look on his face.

"What did you hear?" The question was fairly snarled.

"Well, sir," the man laughed apologetically, "you'll say I'm a bit off, I fear, but to tell you the truth, sir, it sounded like a horse stamping around on the roof!"

A blaze of absolute madness leaped into Tussmann's eyes.

"You fool!" he screamed. "Get out of here!" The man shrank back in amazement and Tussmann snatched up the gleaming toad-carved jewel.

"I've been a fool!" he raved. "I didn't read far enough—and I should have shut the door—but by heaven, the key is mine and I'll keep it in spite of man or devil."

And with these strange words he turned and fled upstairs. A moment later his door slammed heavily and a servant, knocking timidly, brought forth only a blasphemous order to retire and a luridly worded threat to shoot any one who tried to obtain entrance into the room.

Had it not been so late I would have left the house, for I was certain that Tussmann was stark mad. As it was, I retired to the room a frightened servant showed me, but I did not go to bed. I opened the pages of the Black Book at the place where Tussmann had been reading.

This much was evident, unless the man was utterly insane: he had stumbled upon something unexpected in the Temple of the Toad. Something unnatural about the opening of the altar door had frightened

his men, and in the subterraneous crypt Tussmann had found *something* that he had not thought to find. And I believed that he had been followed from Central America, and that the reason for his persecution was the jewel he called the Key.

Seeking some clue in Von Junzt's volume, I read again of the Temple of the Toad, of the strange pre-Indian people who worshipped there, and of the huge, tittering, tentacled, hoofed monstrosity that they worshipped.

Tussmann had said that he had not read far enough when he had first seen the book. Puzzling over this cryptic phrase I came upon the line he had pored over—marked by his thumb nail. It seemed to me to be another of Von Junzt's many ambiguities, for it merely stated that a temple's god was the temple's treasure. Then the dark implication of the hint struck me and cold sweat beaded my forehead.

The Key to the Treasure! And the temple's treasure was the temple's god! And sleeping Things might awaken on the opening of their prison door! I sprang up, unnerved by the intolerable suggestion, and at that moment something crashed in the stillness and the death-scream of a human being burst upon my ears.

In an instant I was out of the room, and as I dashed up the stairs I heard sounds that have made me doubt my sanity ever since. At Tussmann's door I halted, essaying with shaking hand to turn the knob. The door was locked, and as I hesitated I heard from within a hideous high-pitched tittering and then the disgusting squashy sound as if a great, jelly-like bulk was being forced through the window. The sound ceased and I could have sworn I heard a faint swish of gigantic wings. Then silence.

Gathering my shattered nerves, I broke down the door. A foul and overpowering stench billowed out like a yellow mist. Gasping in nausea I entered. The room was in ruins, but nothing was missing except that crimson toad-carved jewel Tussmann called the Key, and that was never found. A foul, unspeakable slime smeared the window-sill, and in the center of the room lay Tussmann, his head crushed and flattened; and on the red ruin of skull and face, the plain print of an enormous hoof.

The Tree-Men of M'bwa

By DONALD WANDREI

A startling story of unknown Africa, strange monstrosities, and the weird power of the Whirling Flux

"SO YOU'RE after big game," said the legless man. "What's your route?"

"Generally speaking," I answered, "up the Congo to its headwaters, then inland, across the Mountains of the Moon to Uganda, and——"

I paused in surprize. The legless man was glaring at me with a curious mixture of fear, hatred, and warning. The expression that fleeted across his face was so strange that I halted in the midst of my sentence.

"Change your route!" he abruptly broke in. "Don't cross the Mountains of the Moon—if you want to come back!"

"Nonsense! I've hunted tigers in India, black panthers in Indo-China, and rubies among the head-hunters of Papua. I'm not afraid of anything that walks."

"I am," said the legless man, and again that curious expression writhed across his features. "And you will be if you keep on. Look at me! Nothing but stumps left of my legs—that's all you'll have when you come back from the Mountains, providing you return at all."

I gingerly felt my leg as if to reassure myself that it was still sound. I was ready enough to scoff, but you never can tell how much to believe in Africa.

Why my boat had stopped in this filthy hell-hole on the Gold Coast, I don't know, but here we were overnight and I had gone ashore to break the monotony of scalding days at sea. It wasn't much improvement, even after sunset. Fierce, steamy heat that made you boil with sweat. An unpleasant smell, half native, half decaying vegetation, that every village seemed to have. And overhead, a huge red moon that was almost as hot as the sun.

As usual, I wound up in the town's one general store, which meant saloon. Drink in the tropics doesn't make you any cooler, but it takes your mind off other things.

Heaven knows it was a squalid enough hut, full of vermin. The only other white man in the place was the legless man. We had sized each other up instantly. It wasn't long before we were taking our drinks together, and gradually unloosening, until I had started to tell him the purpose of my trip—which was to collect museum specimens and look for traces of early man through Central Africa.

That was what set him off. He had looked bothered ever since I mentioned my trip. But I've picked up a lot of valuable information from chance acquaintances, and if there was some unexpected danger beyond the Mountains of the Moon, I wanted to know what it was.

"You evidently think it isn't safe to follow my proposed route. Why? Tell me about it," I urged, and ordered another round.

The eyes of the legless man were turned upon me with an intent, searching gaze. Whatever he found appeared to satisfy him.

"Ever hear of the Angley-Richards expedition?" he began.

"Yes. They started out on pretty much the same route I'm following several years ago, didn't they? Angley died of malaria, and Richards disappeared after some terrible experience. Lost both his——"

"Angley whirled and swung the machete hissing through the air."

Abruptly I halted.

"Legs," finished my companion. "Your memory is good. I am Daniel Richards."

The name came as a shock to me, though I had been half prepared for it. No one had yet learned the whole story of that ill-fated expedition. All interest and attention now, I settled back to listen.

"Ours was really a dual expedition," he continued. "Angley like yourself was after all kinds of game for museums. I had government backing to chart the land formations and hunt for mineral deposits —a sort of geologist-prospector combined.

"We pooled resources for mutual protection. Most of the country we were going through was unexplored. Even today there's no telling what may turn up in some out-of-the-way spot. They haven't begun to exhaust the mysteries of Africa.

"We made our way up the Congo all right, and a devilish trip it was. I've always hated jungles—everything unhealthy seems to grow in them—snakes that strike without warning, flesh-eating plants, and more poisonous insects and deadly vegetation than science yet knows about.

"Well, we got our last supplies at Kola,

then struck out across the continent eastward. As we went farther in and higher up, we left the jungles behind and I felt better. We didn't make progress very fast. I had to map the country as we went, though there wasn't much in the way of rare animals for Angley to bag.

"It must have been over two months from our start before we reached our real base at the foot-hills of the Mountains of the Moon. We had already entered one of the great unexplored tracts. We pitched camp and decided to split our party for a couple of weeks. Angley wanted to go after specimens along the plains. In the meantime, I wished to chart rock formations ahead.

"So we decided to split. In two weeks we would meet again at the camp. If either had not returned by the end of four weeks, the other would follow his trail to find out what was wrong.

"Early one morning, in accordance with our plan, I and my six Neguchi boys started off for the Mountains. The last I saw of Angley was when he and his six boys were heading southward for better game country.

"WE CROSSED the Mountains of the Moon in three days, but we were lucky in finding a pass or it might have taken us much longer to detour. I noted one great igneous intrusion that looked good for diamonds, and several quartzite deposits that yielded gold, silver and mercury. There's many a fortune back there in the heart of Africa for any man who thinks it's worth the risk.

"Beyond the Mountains of the Moon, I decided to keep on for a few days. The country was mostly grass land, with a twisted tree here and there and an occasional swamp. I saw a number of buzzards the first couple of days, and one small herd of antelope. But game was surprizingly scarce. And we hadn't met a native since we broke camp.

"On our sixth day out, I didn't see a solitary living thing. Nothing but the tall grass and the everlasting sun. The Neguchi boys had become suddenly quiet. It's a bad sign when you don't hear them jabber.

"That afternoon I sighted a low hill to the northeast and immediately struck off toward it.

"The Neguchi began to lag.

" 'Keep going, you lazy devils!' I swore.

"One of them spoke up in his dialect. 'No go on. This bad country. M'bwa there,' and he pointed toward the distant hill. 'See! Black men stay away. Birds, beasts, they no come. All 'fraid of M'bwa.'

" 'M'bwa? What's that?'

"He shrugged his shoulders. I cursed, swore, offered him 'bait,' all but beat him. Not another word could I get. For that matter, it was all I could do to make the six Neguchi go on even with the offer of double pay.

"We camped that night at the foot of the hill. The Neguchi huddled close to a fire. The night was strangely silent for Africa. We might as well have been in a desert. I heard only the rustle of cane grass, nothing more. When you've become used to the big cats and roaring carnivores of Africa, silence hurts.

"I woke to a worse silence the next morning. A glance told me that the Neguchi had fled. My stuff was intact but I was wild for a few minutes.

"I could have turned back but didn't. I made a cache of the stuff and decided to push on across the hill, be back by nightfall, then, on the eighth day, begin my return trek. My curiosity was aroused by the obvious fear of the black boys of what lay ahead and their desertion. I

took with me only light rations, but stuffed my belt and pockets with cartridges.

"The stillness was getting on my nerves. I didn't like the looks of it at all. A cloudless sky—and not a bird anywhere. Rustling grass—and not the hum of an insect nor the sound of any animal. There simply wasn't a living thing except myself within sight or hearing.

"But I went on. The hill was not far off. I had reached and climbed it before noon. There was a grassy space on its top and I could see another hill off in the distance, so I knew that a valley must lie below me. I walked across the flat hilltop till I stood on the downward slope.

"Right there I got a shock. A low, circular valley stretched below me with the hill closing it all around like a ring. Perfectly flat it was, perhaps two miles across or less, and not a blade of grass in it. The soil was a dirty gray. And in the midst of it stood a queer structure glinting red in the sun. I'd never seen anything like it. At first I thought it was a pyramid, then I could have sworn it was an obelisk; next moment it looked like a sphere. I rubbed my eyes and looked away, thought of what I knew about mirages, then looked back, and there was the thing, shining a metallic red and never looking the same.

"It was a rum sight, but something else gave me the shock. All around it grew a row of trees, maybe twenty of them or more. The trees varied in height, the tallest one at my left graduating to the smallest at my right. And every last one of those trees looked like a man standing guard!

"The hair rose on my scalp. The tree farthest left stood like a clumsy giant a hundred feet high; the one on the right looked more like an ordinary man. Between them were the other trees in a rising scale. No branches or leaves like trees I knew—just one limb hanging down on each side and a round lump in the middle where a head would be.

"A ripple of cold wind seemed to creep upon me, but I went down the slope until I reached the valley and kept on across the powdery gray soil. I don't know why. Curiosity maybe. Or just the damn fool courage that won't let you be scared out of anything. If you once give in, you're gone.

"I STOPPED about a hundred yards from the trees, where I had a good look at them. That was when I got panicky, for the smallest tree *was looking back at me with the eyes of a living man!* The arms hung limply down. The other trees grew bigger toward the end one, which hardly seemed human at all except for its huge limbs and five gnarled branches like fingers that trailed down from the end of each limb.

"And behind them was that strange reddish metal structure that shimmered dizzily, now like a pyramid, a cone, a ball—God knows what it was really like, I couldn't tell. I thought I saw writing on it but it wasn't the writing of any language I'd ever known.

"The impulse to flee came upon me, terror at some unknown evil gripped me, but somehow I went on, alert, wary.

"I didn't see him come. Maybe he was behind the trees or that wavering metallic structure. I don't know. But there he was all of a sudden, not fifty yards away, a horribly wrinkled old black, with a face as pasty as the gray ground, and a blank look in his eyes. What's more, he was coming straight at me, no mistake about it.

" 'Halt!' I shouted and raised my rifle.

"There wasn't a pause in his stride. In complete, sheer terror I let him have it,

both barrels full in the chest. I saw the bullets crash clear through him, but he didn't even falter, and not a drop of blood came from the livid flesh around the holes.

"Then I turned to run and he was on me like the wind. He was cold, his eyes were dead like a corpse's, and I knew I was up against something beyond the most frightful dream. Never a sound did he make, never a light of life or intelligence shone in his dead eyes; he moved like living death, soulless, stiff, and his flesh was like ice but his strength was terrific.

"He jumped me from behind, but I doubled up and flung him forward over my back. I knew my gun was useless. I leaped clear over on top of him and sank my fingers in his throat. But it didn't make any difference. He paid no attention to my strangle-hold, but mechanically fumbled around with his hands and suddenly my wrists were bound.

"Sick with horror at this monster that nothing could destroy, I kicked, wrenched around, brought my arms down with a smash that raked his face, lunged head first into his stomach. He went down like a sack of flour, and immediately was on his feet coming stiffly back.

"In ten minutes it was all over. I was firmly tied. The inhuman thing rose without a sign of emotion on its pasty gray face or a sound of breathing, though my own lungs gulped for air. It walked jerkily toward and into the whirling red structure. In a minute it came out again and over to me. I saw gleaming knives in its hands, and other objects.

" 'Well, it's the end,' I thought, and wondered foolishly if I would ever be found.

"But the knife didn't rip into me as I expected. The thing pried my teeth apart with its loathly fingers, at whose touch I nearly vomited. Then down my throat trickled a sluggish liquor that seemed to burn and scald like fire and afterward freeze and congeal the blood in my veins. As in a dream, I saw the pasty thing cut long slits in my legs and busy itself with other objects. But I felt no pain, only a great nausea, and gradually the most merciful sleep I ever knew descended upon me. My last recollection was of being lifted.

"I AWOKE with a heavy, sluggish feeling of torpor. I appeared to be standing but somehow couldn't move, though I swayed a little. It required a herculean effort for me to open my weighted eyelids.

"Only a kind of dull inner shudder racked me at what I saw. My legs were rooted to the ground. I was one of that circle of Tree-men. How long I remained in a daze of horror I don't know. Something snapped finally and I waved arms that were ponderously stiff feebly around, screamed myself hoarse, wore myself out trying to move even an inch. I stopped only when the blackness of shock and exhaustion swept over me.

"I wakened again to an inarticulate whisper. Had my ears deceived me? I listened intently.

" 'Stranger, can you hear me? My time is almost up and I have waited long.'

"Slowly, laboriously, I managed to open my eyes and twist around. The Tree-man nearest me was looking in my direction. Pity, despair, anguish all struggled in his eyes.

" 'Yes,' I finally succeeded in answering, and my voice was thick, unnatural. 'Who or what are you? And in God's name, what nightmare is this?'

"He shook his head gravely, and whispered faintly, 'No nightmare, it is living death. We are the Tree-men of M'bwa.' And then, pleadingly, 'What year is this?'

"I told him—1931.

"He sighed. 'Twenty long years, and now the end approaches. Oh, what I would not give for one sight of my native land and one kiss from lips that have waited in vain if they waited at all!'

"He seemed to dream of something far away for a long while, before he said, 'I tried to warn you, but it was too late, and M'bwa was waiting.'

"That name again—it echoed in my brain. 'M'bwa!' I hoarsely cried. 'Who is he? What is he?'

"But his mind drifted off again and another long period elapsed before he spoke. I knew he was going fast, that consciousness would soon leave him for ever.

" 'M'bwa,' he at last said thickly, 'is dead. He has been for centuries. But he moves at the bidding of the master in the Whirling Flux, and the dead walk when the master commands. So the Tree-man next me said, and he was told by the Tree-man beyond him, and thus the story has been passed on.'

" 'Who is the master?'

" 'I do not know,' came the slow response. 'No one has ever seen him. He came to earth in the days before Rome, before Egypt or Babylon. He is of a different universe, a different dimension, and he dwells in the Whirling Flux. I know not why he waits, or for what, he who has communion with entities older than earth and titans that strode across the stars before Mu had sunk or Atlantis risen.'

"I did not understand half of what he was saying. 'Who are the Tree-men? Has no one escaped from this valley?'

" 'There is no escape,' he went on. 'The Tree-men are unfortunate adventurers like yourself and me who have stumbled on the valley. Those who trespass serve as warning to all others. Only at long intervals have the foolhardy and the brave ventured to this place where no animal comes and which the black tribes avoid. I was told that the first Tree-man was an Atlantean, and the next an ancient Egyptian, and the third a Roman exile. But I do not know. The master rules M'bwa, who was the first ever to come and who has been dead for centuries beyond history but who comes forth as he will always come forth to protect the secret of the valley. It is M'bwa who gives the paralyzing drug and makes the incisions and bridges the gap between animal and vegetable kingdoms. But it is the master who directs, the Evil Old One who came down from the stars in years beyond reckoning.'

"His voice trailed off. I think the effort of speech after so long a silence cost him what was left of his mind. He never spoke again.

"No escape! The words burned in my memory. Then I thought of my agreement with Angley. I hoped he would come, yet hoped he would not. For neither he nor any other human being could combat an antagonist who was outside human laws or the known world. Was the story told by the Tree-man true or partly the result of brooding? I had no means of telling.

"SO THE days passed, heavy, monotonous. Only a dead gray expanse and a curving hill to look at. Only the silent Tree-men for companions. And behind, that Flux of unknown metal, acting by the laws of an unknown other dimension. And ever in my veins crept the sluggish flow, a flow that I knew would some day conquer me and drive out my awareness even as the other Tree-men had become inanimate, insensate things.

"Nothing lived in the valley. No bird flew overhead. Always silence, and the

dreary routine of thinking, remembering, plotting, in order to avoid madness. Complete inaction, hopeless inertia. And there was no escape. I lost track of the days. Would Angley come? Would M'bwa capture him, too? Where was M'bwa? But from the time of my own capture I had not seen him again. Many an hour I wasted shouting myself hoarse at the Tree-man nearest me. He did not answer. He swayed dumbly, already on the way to that hideous transformation which would leave him only the travesty of human form.

"Unconsciously I found myself hoping as the days piled up. I wanted desperately to hear a voice. It would mean death to Angley. Often I wore myself into a nervous exhaustion and stupor, writhing, squirming, struggling to free myself until sleep brought a short relief. And oh! the horror of years whose every day would be the same until madness or mindless oblivion descended!

"My thoughts became chaotic. I think I must have gone out of my head for long periods. The sight of what I was, the knowledge of what I was to become lay like a monstrous worm gnawing inside me.

"One day I had a delirium. I thought that Angley, faithful Angley, had come to save me. I wept with happiness, watched him with pathetic relief.

"And then fright paralyzed me. *This was no dream!* Angley stood, as I had stood, not more than a hundred yards off, his face a mask of loathing and horror.

" 'Angley!' I shrieked. 'It's Richards! Watch out for the black M'bwa! He can't be killed! Run, for God's sake, run for your life!'

"I saw a horrified look whiten his face. My warning came too late.

"The dead monster M'bwa was stiffly pacing toward him. Even as I, Angley raised his rifle and sent both barrels crashing into the hideous thing, where gaping new holes appeared. But M'bwa went on without pause.

"I saw Angley's hand swoop to his side and as the marching horror approached him, a blade flashed high in his arm and with a terrific side-sweep he decapitated M'bwa.

"Almost in the same moment Angley had raced over to me and again the heavy machete flashed high and sang clear through my limbs. He caught me as I fell. I writhed in agony, shrieked, twisted, and thin trickles of blood and watery stuff oozed out of the stumps that remained of my legs.

"Angley slung me over his shoulder and began stumbling back, white-faced, machete still clutched in one hand. There came a strange, high whine from behind, and even in my pain I turned to see. The Red Flux had come to rest, and out of it issued the titanic lich that haunts my dreams, with its tatters of vaporous flesh and the flapping black streamers that whipped from it as it towered to the skies above and yet sprawled over to M'bwa and set the dead head back on the dead shoulders. Then it was gone, all in a flash, the Evil Old One who came down from the stars in the days when the world was young, and the Red Flux was in its sickening dimensional whirl, and there was M'bwa stiffly striding after us.

" 'Drop me! Save yourself!' I cried through the spate of blood and foam that was forming on my lips. But Angley only ran faster in great leaping strides. Now we were on the hill's slope, panting up it, but the foul horror was closer, closer, racing like a fitful wind, tireless as a machine——

"Suddenly Angley whirled and swung the machete around and shot it hissing through the air. M'bwa, severed from

neck to waist, rolled in two utterly abominable parts down the slope, and not a drop of clean blood appeared anywhere on the livid raw flesh of that frightful wound.

"With a terrific charge, Angley was over the hill and crashing down its far side, and then we were stumbling toward the distant Mountains of the Moon.

"I shall never know how we made it. I remember a fantasmagoria of endless pain and agony that racked my body, of thirst and hunger and raving delirium, and the endless ache of muscles that throbbed for rest in our almost incessant flight toward safety.

"Angley came down with malaria, somewhere on our trek to the coast. He was dead when I came to, weeks later, in a ship's sickroom. They had amputated my legs almost to the thigh. But I wouldn't go back to civilization looking like that. I debarked at Bordeaux and shipped back here on the first boat I could get."

A great silence fell. Somewhere afar a jackal barked.

"So you see," Richards ended, "why I said, 'Don't go to the Mountains of the Moon.' "

I'll admit his story shook me pretty badly, but I was still game. After all—a wild yarn in a saloon on the Gold Coast—I couldn't let that interfere with all my plans.

"Well, we'll see," I hedged.

With a sudden nervous jerk, he ripped away the pad on his stumps.

"Now do you believe?" he almost screamed. "That's what I got—and every month they have to be cut off!"

Sick, shuddering, I went into the night. From the stumps of his legs, pale, thin feelers like young shoots of a tree hung limply down.

The Gallows Tree

By **OTIS ADELBERT KLINE**

Like some foul fungus grown in charnel bed,
  Sprung up between the darkness and the dawn,
A fearful tree has reared its naked head,
  But without aid of seed or spore or spawn.

One leafless limb with hempen tendril on
  Its barren tip, ensnares a visage dread.
  The tree has fruited, and the fruit is dead;
A tree that knew not seed nor spore nor spawn.

As if by some unhallowed instinct led,
  Or by some gruesome bond of interest drawn,
A host of croaking harpies comes, is fed,
  Leaves naught but whitened bones, and then is gone.
All barren stands the tree that bore the dead,
  A tree that left no seeds nor spores nor spawn.

The Laughing Duke

By WALLACE G. WEST

An eery tale of the days of the robber barons, when human life was cheap—the revenge of Duke Florian

IN THE old time, when the world was full of a number of things which have since been forgotten, a great man lay dying at his castle in the land of Provence.

He was Florian of Orthow, known throughout France as the Laughing Duke, and he was gasping out his life in his tall canopied bed from the effects of what had at first been considered a minor dagger wound in the back.

Monsieur Morand, the physician, felt the nobleman's pulse for the last time, gathered up his leeches in their little jars, his lancet, the bleeding-bowl which held a few ounces of watery fluid which he had just drained from the duke's veins, and shook his head sorrowfully.

"I have done all I can," he announced, bowing to Sir Robert, the duke's nephew and now rightful heir. "It distresses me greatly to see such a fine gentleman die at the hands of a cowardly assassin, but my medicines can do no more."

Sir Robert shook his black curly head slowly and replied: " 'Tis not your fault, doctor, but that of my scoundrelly cousin who lies in prison awaiting the hangman.

"Come," he added. "There is nothing more you can do here. I know you will wish to prepare for your long journey back to Paris and I would have a word with you before you depart. Monsignor Bellaire" (he bowed to a monstrously fat, sweet-faced monk who sat at the bedside) "will watch over my uncle until I return,"

Robert led the way to his uncle's spacious library, a tall gloomy room lined with strange, incomprehensible books by such savants as Paracelsus, Van Helmont and Agrippa von Nettesheim. Once there he locked the door carefully and his whole attitude changed.

"Jacques," he said to the doctor, "you have played your part well. Although you never held a license from any college of surgeons you have bled the life out of yon old buzzard in a workman-like and thorough-going manner. Here is your reward."

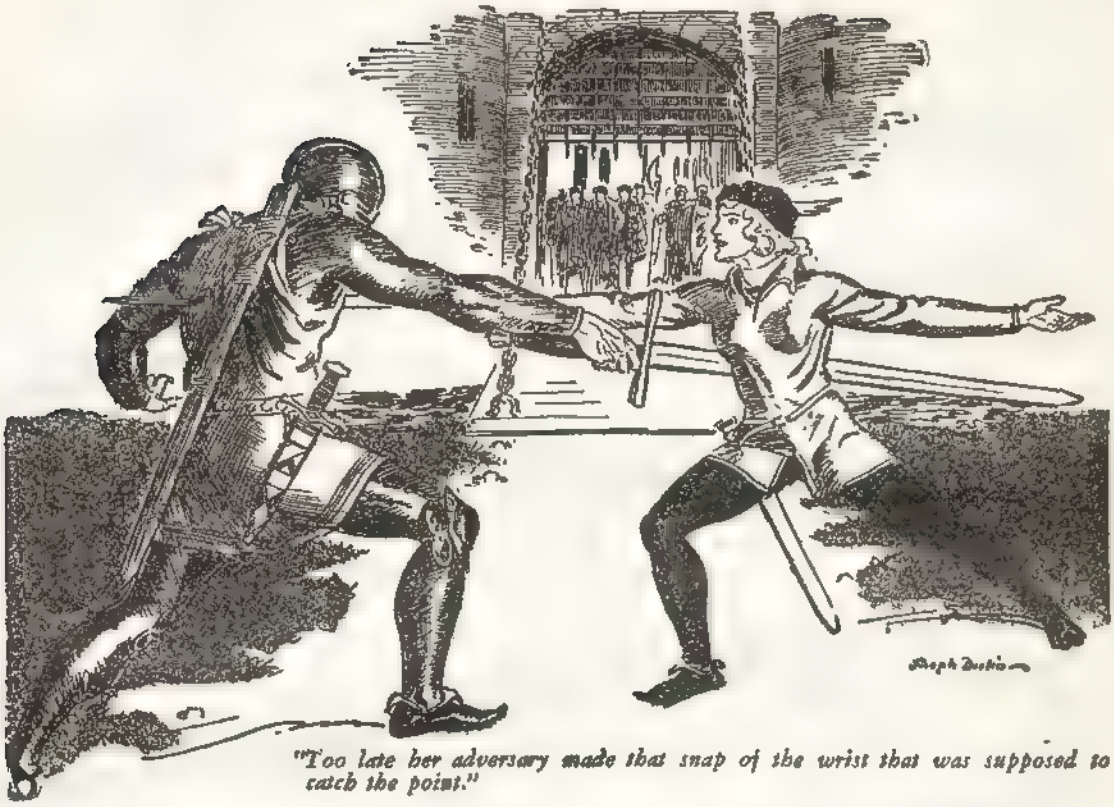
He dropped a sack of gold into the claw-like hand extended.

"But remember, our lives are not safe until the craw of my cousin Gilbert has been properly stretched at Avignon prison. And," he added sharply, "if you should dare turn traitor and cross me"—the pseudo-physician's wizened face paled before the steady glare of those black eyes—"if you should cross me, I shall cross you in a somewhat different fashion, though I die for it." And Black Robert, as he was known to his few friends and many enemies, significantly touched the dagger at his side.

Be it said for the physician that he did not visibly quail.

"Your grace knows I have served you well on other occasions," he replied calmly. "Better receive small pay from one you can trust," and he sneered slightly as he weighed the sack of ducats in his hand, "than have your gullet slit by others who make better promises."

IN THE sickroom at that moment a terrific struggle seemed to be going on in the dying man. Under its shock of silver hair the duke's face, whose bloodless outlines had a few minutes before been



"Too late her adversary made that snap of the wrist that was supposed to catch the point."

marked by the peaceful seal of death, twitched and quivered as though the soul, at the very moment of departure, had decided to return.

With a desperate effort the old man sat erect. His hands emerged from under the bedclothing. His voice croaked unintelligibly.

Hurriedly the priest slipped one hand behind the dying man's shoulders and whispered reassuringly, "Yes, yes."

But this only increased the duke's fury. At last his voice became audible.

"A pen. A pen," he rasped. "Write! Write!"

The priest placed a wetted goose-quill in his writhing fingers and a large piece of parchment on his knees.

As though his soul were driving an already dead body, the hand began to move jerkily.

"From knowledge vouchsafed me while dying," the words sprawled crazily across the page, "I, Florian, Duke of Orthow, hereby disinherit my nephew, Robert the Black-hearted, and charge him with having mur——"

Here the pen went out of control. Grimly the man on the bed fought to make it conform to his iron will, but in vain. The goose-quill slipped gradually from his stiffening fingers.

At that moment the great door of the chamber opened and Sir Robert returned.

The duke looked up, his writing forgotten. One emaciated arm rose shakily, but the fingers hung limp as he tried to shake his fist at the younger man.

"I heard! I heard!" cried he in the same great voice with which he had many times led men to battle. "Robin, thou cowardly ingrate. I—will—return!"

Then, as he saw the altered look on the face of his nephew the old man burst out

into a great laugh. It rang through the dusk of the bedchamber like a bugle call —that same laugh which had made the duke famous throughout all France: mocking, debonair and unafraid of God or devil.

And, still laughing, the duke toppled backward on the pillows. This time he was entirely a corpse.

Pale as though he had met a ghost, Black Robert advanced to the bedside, roughly pushing away a nurse who had rushed to his uncle's assistance. Picking up a mirror, he held it to the still lips. There was no cloud upon the glass. The breath had stopped.

"Strange that his mind should wander at the last," said the knight in a shaken voice. "I had hoped he might die content. But it must have been delirium," he added, looking stealthily at Monsignor Bellaire. "Did he say anything else?"

"Nothing beyond asking for pen and parchment."

The new Duke of Orthow snatched at the paper. As he saw the writing was meaningless a sickly smile spread over his swarthy, handsome countenance.

"Vagaries of a wandering mind," he muttered. "But they hurt. For I loved him like a son since he took me and my ungrateful cousin under his protection years ago."

He bowed his head, gave a few orders relative to funeral arrangements and walked slowly from the room to the accompaniment of muttered prayers from Father Bellaire, who was kneeling at the foot of the bed, and muffled sobs from the nurse, who had loved her master.

The funeral was held with all the pomp of a great house. Not many days thereafter Duke Robert mounted his black charger and, with his great, two-handed sword clanking in its scabbard between his shoulder-blades, rode down to Avignon to see that justice was done to that rascally Gilbert who had been convicted of stabbing his uncle in the back.

Not many weeks later Monsignor Bellaire officiated at another death-bed, that of Lady Dorothy, daughter of the widowed Duchess of Mecklenberg, whose castle lay not far from that of Orthow.

"Ah, Dorothy, Dorothy," the good priest murmured, stroking the soft chestnut hair of the beautiful girl who lay pining her heart away between the silken sheets. "Why will you mourn for Duke Robert, who is unworthy of you? His ambitions have made him forget your love for him. That should show he was unworthy of your love. Forget him. Smile at the sun once again, as you did when I taught you your catechism years ago."

But the girl only turned her face a little more toward the wall. The monk sighed and glanced at the physician.

Dr. Vosberg shook his head sorrowfully.

"It is no use, father," he said. "Physically there is nothing wrong with her, yet life is flowing from Lady Dorothy as though from a sieve. She refuses to live. Poor, foolish girl."

The priest nodded.

"Strange," he said. "She loved Robert, while Gilbert loved her. And now Robert is Duke of Orthow and has pledged his troth to another, while Gilbert, who was to have been the duke, rots in Avignon prison. I wonder," he added thoughtfully, "if Gilbert really killed the old duke. It was not his nature."

The doctor's answer was interrupted by a slight commotion on the bed. "Look," he cried. "The end has come." Picking up the inevitable mirror he held it to the quiet lips. Not a cloud showed.

Father Bellaire crossed himself and began murmuring the liturgy for the dead.

"Not yet, father!"

It was the girl who had spoken.

Both men stared thunder-struck as Dorothy turned her face from the wall and opened her eyes.

"Not yet, father," she repeated. "I'm not dead. There's too much for me to do." She actually tried to sit up but was too weak.

"Dorothy, Dorothy," cried the priest, his face bathed in tears. "My child has returned."

"Yes, perhaps," replied the girl, her rich contralto voice growing strong. "But have them bring me some food. I'm abominably hungry."

Dorothy's recovery was almost miraculously rapid. Within two days she was up and about and frightening her mother, the widowed duchess, with her strange caprices. For somewhere during her illness the girl had acquired a mordant sarcasm unlike that of her former gentle self.

In fact, her language showed traces of the vitriol of an old campaigner when she used it upon retainers of the duchy who had grown lax in their duties since the duke's death.

As she grew stronger Dorothy strode about the castle and its environs with a lithe, free stride that made her mother blush and remonstrate in vain, and tongue-lashed the gardeners, the hostlers, the peasants and the overseers until the duchy, which had been falling into decay, began to resume the appearance of old times.

"Dorothy, Dorothy," moaned the duchess, who was the soul of propriety, "whatever has come over you? Where has my sweet girl gone? You have forgotten your embroidery and your painting and go tramping about for all the world as if you were a man."

"Don't worry, mother," answered her daughter, kissing her tenderly. "But, damn it all, there's so much to be done. I've almost regained my strength now. When I'm fit I'll be leaving you for a while. Dark deeds have been done in Provence, and I am the only one who can right them."

Turning on her heel in the dress which she had shortened beyond all seemliness, Dorothy left her mother staring open-mouthed.

A week thereafter a youth, dressed in light but costly chain armor and wearing at his side a slim scabbard which held the strangest sword ever seen in Provence, slipped out of the postern gate of Mecklenberg at dawn, leading the slim gray horse which once had been a favorite of the duke. Mounting, he rode briskly down the road toward Avignon.

The duchess fainted some hours later when her maid reported that Dorothy was nowhere to be found.

In Avignon prison Gilbert of Orthow sat watching the construction of his own gallows from the window of his cell. It was a spring morning. Flowers were blossoming in crannies of the prison yard. A robin hopped upon the ledge of his barred window and eyed him pertly. Gilbert tossed it a few crumbs which were left from his breakfast and smiled faintly.

He was a handsome chap, with curly red hair, blue eyes with depths to them and a long, lean body. His face showed the strain of his many days in prison; his skin was pale. But there was a quirk in the corners of his mouth as he watched the bird eagerly gobbling the crumbs.

"That's right, old fellow. Enjoy yourself while you may," he chuckled, the robin cocking one round eye at him the while. "Eat heartily, for tomorrow you too may fall into a snare."

In the prison yard all was activity, for it was not often the warden had opportunity of hanging the cousin of a duke. The gallows was being built strong and high. The Duke of Orthow himself had given advice on its construction.

Gilbert, tired of watching the workmen and the soft blue sky which he would see no more after the next two days, sat down on his pallet and eased the leg shackle which bound him to the wall.

It was a cruel thing with teeth inside which bit into the flesh if he moved suddenly.

"Don't kick against the pricks!" he quoted. "But I'm lucky not to be in the stinking dungeon. It must have been dear Rob's idea to place me where I could see the gallows go up."

He sighed. His only consolation during the month of his imprisonment had been occasional visits from Father Bellaire. The tall, rotund prelate, with his gentle voice and friendly humor, wedged himself into the cell whenever he could leave his pastoral duties and joked with or comforted the prisoner as need was.

But Gilbert knew he was making his parish rounds today and could not come.

The condemned man's meditations were broken by the rattling of keys in the ponderous lock of the cell door. The night guard entered, yawning, for it was near the end of his watch. Behind him was a friar in black robe and tightly drawn cowl.

"The priest asked to see you," said the guard roughly but not unkindly. "I brought him in, as I thought since you will be stretched all out of shape presently you would want to come to some sort of terms with God." He grinned. "When you are through, call for Henri," he added to the priest. "He will let you out. I will be off duty."

Gilbert stared at the newcomer as the guard withdrew. When they were alone the friar tossed back his cowl and stepped into the sunlight which had just begun pouring through the high window.

"Dorothy!" cried the prisoner. "How come you here? And I heard you were ill unto death at Castle Mecklenberg."

She laughed, a low throaty murmur which made the robin who still sat upon the window-ledge so jealous he abandoned hope of more crumbs and took flight.

"I thought better of dying," she replied. "Listen. There is little time for talking. We must get out of here as soon as the guards change." She waved aside his startled remonstrance. "Enough to say I know you are innocent and that Robert is as black a villain as his nickname would indicate."

"But you are mad!" cried Gilbert. "Look. They are building my gallows already. Before two suns have set I shall be as dead as my uncle."

"You may be wrong on both points," smiled the girl. "Be quiet and I shall tell you how we may fool these dolts of guards and escape. See," she took from under her cassock another robe. "This was made for Father Bellaire. It would cover a—griffin. We will fix it—so."

She threw the garment over his shoulders and pulled the cowl tight.

"Now stand still while I show you a trick I learned in Florence—I mean a trick I heard was once used there. Look. I will stand on your toes—so. I am quite short, thank heaven. Now pull the robe about both of us. There! Doesn't that make a sizable paunch for you? Now fold your hands piously as Father Bellaire does, bow your head and waddle ponderously about.

"Splendid," she cried, popping her head from under the cassock. "That would fool the good devil himself. Now, quick, quick! Roll the bedclothes to represent Sir Gilbert of Orthow lying on his pallet trying to snatch a few hours of troubled rest before he goes where rest is never troubled. When the new guard passes he must see Father Bellaire sadly contemplating a sleeping prisoner. Oh, that sleepy Armand will never

think to tell his friend Henri it is not Father Bellaire who visits you today. At least I hope not. If he does, it will be adieu, my friend."

"But Dorothy, I can not allow you to imperil yourself like this for me," cried Gilbert, who had just managed to catch his breath after all the preparations. "I insist that you——"

"Insist! Insist! Who are you to insist? You're the same as a dead man. Did you ever defy your uncle when he told you to do something for your own good and the good of France? Well, your uncle has made me his agent—never mind how—so do as you're told, youngster."

With no more ado she set to work at the soft iron of his gyves with a file, muffling the sound under her robe.

An hour later, when that work was done, there was the clank of halberds in the corridor as the guard was changed. The two conspirators took their positions.

"Your blessing, Father Bellaire," said Henri a few minutes later as he peered through the door on his tour of inspection.

"You have it, my son," replied Gilbert from beneath his cowl, endeavoring to imitate the quiet voice of the prelate.

Henri passed on without suspicion.

"Now for it," came the muffled voice of Dorothy a few minutes later. "I'm almost smothered under this robe."

The guard returned at Gilbert's call and unlocked the door. Striving as best he could to imitate the shuffling gait of the man he was supposed to be, the prisoner and his living burden followed Henri down the hall and into the courtyard.

The long robe swept the ground and evidently no one noticed his awkwardness.

Out the prison gate they stumbled and into the crooked streets. Gilbert felt his heart beating heavily with the strain and the girl's fluttering in answer to it.

"Turn up the first alley," she whispered. "There are horses for us there. Is anybody about?"

"Only a few laborers. They see nothing wrong about a lopsided priest. But best be silent——"

Slowly he plowed through the mud of the fetid alley she had indicated until two tethered horses came in sight.

Dorothy slipped from his arms and shed her robe. He saw she was dressed in a jerkin of mail and rich, dark trunks. On her saddle-bow were strapped a velvet cloak and a queer sort of sword.

"Up with you," she cried gayly. "Keep your robe. You shall still be a priest escorting a knight on some holy journey. Have no fear, Dobbin will not throw you, father," she mocked.

From under the edge of his cowl Gilbert stared with amazement and secret delight at this stalwart, beautiful Diana, who rode her charger straight as a soldier and whistled a rollicking song of the camps as they left the awakening town, passed by the palace of the popes and rode out into the flowering hedgerows and orchards of the open country.

He had loved Dorothy as a quiet, bashful girl, who sat with downcast eyes beside her mother, embroidering or playing the harpischord. But as he saw her now, her sweet, softly rounded figure revealed in the clinging mail, she was infinitely more lovable, even though her language, when her horse stumbled once, was not—well——

"Dorothy——" he said, then stopped, for there was so much to ask.

She smiled at him.

"Proceed, Sir Knight, and I will endeavor to alleviate your unquenchable curiosity," she jeered, and rode on chuckling at his flood of questions, most of which she skilfully avoided answering.

Knowing the alarm would be given at the next round of the guard they rode toward Paris at top speed, for there the girl

said she might obtain evidence to prove her companion's innocence.

It was a long journey. Though the weather was fine some of the roads still were hock-deep in mud. They slept on horseback and talked little after the first day.

At a village armorer's shop Gilbert found a corselet of lapped steel scales which was not heavy and enabled him to shed his shabby prison raiment and assume the guise of a gentleman once more.

They obtained changes of horses frequently and felt confident of out-distancing all pursuit.

IT WAS dusk a week later when they rode unchallenged through the gates of Paris. It had rained that day and their horses sloshed wearily through the tortuous, ill-paved and worse-drained streets.

"Now that we're here," grumbled Gilbert, "you might tell me what you intend to do."

"Softly, softly, Sir Knight," she replied. "First we shall seek one Jacques Morand, physician extraordinary and friend of the new Duke of Orthow. That should be simple unless he is living under an assumed name. We shall look first into the dives and second into the prisons. If he is in neither place, God help us."

With a dexterity which showed her entirely familiar with the infamous by-streets of Paris, Dorothy led the way toward Montmartre, inquiring at likely and boisterous dens regarding the object of their search.

It was not long until a blousy landlord recalled a Dr. Morand.

"Aye! A truly great physician," he declared, spreading apart his fat hands. "Always with money in his pocket. Not three days ago he royally entertained his friends here, and paid me a pretty penny for the privilege. Just now he is recovering from that entertainment. You probably will find him, gentlemen, in his chemist's shop at the corner of the Rues Falaise and Burgos."

Following his directions they were not long in drawing up before the shop, if such it might be called. It was located in a foul-smelling basement from which a slippery flight of stairs led to the street.

They descended noiselessly, and peered through a dirty window. A candle, stuck in a wine-bottle, sat on a long table just inside. Near it the pseudo-physician hunched over a great tome, laboriously spelling out the Latin words. A yellow cat sat upright beyond the candle and stared unwinkingly into the flame.

From time to time Morand would dip his hand into a basin beside him and return it full of sunflower seeds which he nibbled at his leisure.

"Now," whispered Dorothy. "You are stronger. Hold him while I stuff a handkerchief into his mouth and bind him with the rope of your cassock."

Together they flung their shoulders against the door. It crashed open. Morand leaped to his feet, one hand still full of seeds, the other gripping a wicked dagger. Behind him the cat swelled to twice its normal size and spat.

It was a quick fight and merry, but Monsieur Morand was out of training and soon was tripped up, bound, gagged and flung into a corner. The cat crouched beside him.

"Now what?" queried Gilbert.

"First push the table against the door and draw the shades," directed Dorothy. "Then, I suppose," she added in a louder tone, "we shall have to torture this dog until he confesses who hired him to murder Duke Florian."

The figure in the corner writhed and gurgled.

"We will try a trick I learned—I mean that was used during the wars with Italy," she continued, winking one brown eye at

Gilbert. "It can't possibly maim a man. Of course he may drown, if he's stubborn, but that's his own fault.

"Do you fasten this person face upward on the floor. Tie his arms and legs to anything solid. He mustn't be able to squirm. Now I need a good, strong funnel. Ah, here is one that's just right. Lucky we are dealing with a famous physician who keeps such trifles handy. Now, most important, I must have water."

She searched carefully, but no water was available.

"Well, this will do just as well," she said finally, trundling a cask of wine from the shadows. "He will at least die happy.

"Splendid work, Gil," she continued in her semi-monotone as she saw her early instructions had been obeyed. "Now sit you down and hold this fine gentleman's nose, firmly—so, while I remove this gag and insert the end of the funnel between his teeth. Bravo! 'Tis done.

"Now, friend Jacques," she snapped, all her raillery gone, "will you sign a confession telling who hired you to bleed Duke Florian to his death, and also who had him stabbed in the dark?"

"You devil," gasped the rat-faced physician through his funnel, "let me up at once or I shall shout for the guard."

"So, you are obdurate," said his tormenter. "Hold his nose tightly, Gilbert. We shall strive to dampen his ardor."

Dipping a big ladle of wine from the cask, she poured it gurgling down the funnel. Morand spluttered, choked, then, to get air again, drank the potion in long gulps.

"Now will you sign?" queried the girl.

He shook his head stubbornly, but there was a look of terror in his eyes. She refilled the ladle and poured again.

Gilbert felt sick but kept tight hold on the prone man's nostrils as he heaved and struggled.

The battle was won as Dorothy filled the dipper for the sixth time. His eyes distended, his face purple, the miserable doctor nodded his head frantically as the wine hovered over him.

"Oh, God, no more!" he panted when he could breathe again. "I'm splitting. A pen—paper. I'll tell everything; only put that cursed funnel away."

And tell everything he did as he crouched again beside the candle and scribbled furiously while his teeth chattered like castanets.

The gist of the document was that Sir Robert, realizing that Gilbert, being slightly older and a favorite, would receive the title at the death of Duke Florian, had hit upon a scheme of stabbing the old man and throwing the blame on his cousin.

The project succeeded so well that when servants, hearing the duke's cries, rushed to the courtyard where he had been walking, they found him with Gilbert's dagger between his ribs from behind while Gilbert himself was kneeling beside the wounded man.

"Aye. I heard him cry out and ran to see what was wrong," muttered Gilbert as this point in the writing was reached. "There the servants found me and at the orders of Robert locked me in the dungeon."

But Sir Florian, being hale, in spite of his sixty-five years, refused to die, the confession continued, and it was necessary to bring into the case one Dr. Jacques Morand of Paris, whom Robert called the greatest surgeon in France but who was in reality a rascally drinking companion of university days.

There was little more. The duke expired in spite of all Dr. Morand could do and the latter departed for Paris after having received a really staggering fee from the new pretender, Gilbert in the

meantime having been duly convicted of murder and incarcerated in Avignon prison.

WITH the confession in hand and the still chattering chemist between them, Gilbert and Dorothy appeared at Plessis-les-Tours palace the next morning to wait upon the king.

It was only after long debate that they had decided to enter the "spider's nest" bristling with watch-towers and guards, where Louis XI, the "terrible king," was making a last desperate fight against a loathsome disease.

Gilbert was for riding back to Orthow, raising a levy and laying siege to the castle. But Dorothy pointed out that Louis, who had obtained nominal sovereignty over the province the year before, could make Robert's position absolutely untenable if he fastened blame for the murder upon him. As usual her counsel prevailed.

Evidently they still were ahead of the news of Gilbert's escape, because the monarch, learning the heir of the Duchy of Mecklenberg (and a likely-looking wench at that) was waiting to see him on an affair of importance, received them in his bedchamber.

The ungainly monarch seemed feeling better than usual. He had not bothered to don the gorgeous raiment under which he still tried to hide his infirmities from the eyes of foreign diplomats.

Instead he greeted them wrapped in the dirty gray cloak which he had worn when he prowled about France in his younger days, and with the old felt hat, from which dangled the leaden figure of a saint, pulled well down over his eyes.

His keen, piercing eyes and long hook-nose gave his grotesque face the appearance of the head of a bird of prey, but his rickety legs, extended straight before him as he sat in a heavy padded chair, disclosed his weakness.

"Come forward, my lady," the king said in his most honeyed accents as they entered. "To what do I owe this visit from one of my newest subjects?" His eyes approvingly swept her slim figure in its masculine disguise, for Louis, until the day of his death, was not above appreciating a well-turned limb.

"I regret the necessity of appearing before Your Majesty in this unseemly garb," said his visitor, curtseying deeply, "but it is a matter of life and death which can not delay." And she told her story and produced the confession.

As Louis read, his long, lantern-jawed face clouded with fury.

"Damme," he cried, his voice cracking with age and anger. "There shall be much hanging in my duchy of Orthow, if I be not mistaken. And who are these," he demanded, appearing to look for the first time at Dorothy's companions.

When he learned and heard Morand's stammering confirmation of the confession, his majesty did not hesitate.

"Take this rat to the dungeons," he ordered, pointing out the chemist to the guards. "We will have him tortured at our leisure." Then from an astrologer who stood behind his chair in spangled robe and pointed cap, Louis took pen, ink, paper and his seal.

A few minutes later he handed to Gilbert the royal edict, which read:

> "I, Louis, King of France, hereby decree that for the murder of his uncle and my loyal friend, Duke Florian of Orthow, the lands and chattels of Robert, pretender to the title, shall be declared forfeit, he shall be outlawed, and Sir Gilbert shall be named Duke of Orthow in his place.
>
> LOUIS, REX."

"Will you need troops to help you reconquer the duchy?" the king then asked Gilbert. "You have only to ask for as many of the royal forces as you require."

But Gilbert recalled that the king, ever

avid for new taxes, seldom recalled his troops when once they were quartered in outlying provinces; so he declined with thanks.

"None will fight against us when they learn of Your Majesty's decree," he explained, bowing low. "Black Robert is not loved at Orthow. Besides, I have only to ask for troops from Mecklenberg and they will be supplied without causing you such great expense."

Louis smiled crookedly as he measured the new duke of Orthow with his cunning little eyes, but he nodded and let them go.

ONCE more in the open country, Dorothy showed no haste to return to Orthow Castle.

"There is time enough," she temporized when Gilbert wanted them to spur forward. "Let news of the king's decree precede us. Then we shall not be in danger of being thrown into prison at every crossroad.

"And besides, life is sweet," she sighed, her usual merry smile vanishing, "and there is so little of it left for me—for all of us. Let us idle along under the blue sky and forget our high destiny for a while."

So idle they did, sometimes wandering far afield when blossoming hedgerows beckoned, or spending long hours in the sunshine lying under the trees and talking idly of everything in the world.

Gilbert was continually amazed at the wide experience and knowledge of the world which this chit of a girl seemed to have. She told him of old campaigns, the gay cities of Spain and Italy, and the famous personages of a bygone generation.

"How did you learn all this?" he puzzled.

"From my father, who fought in the wars," she would answer lightly, and go on to some new picaresque tale which made him roar with laughter.

At night they would stop at the jolly French inns and carouse a bit with the wandering adventurers and friars and country people whom they met there.

Sometimes there were sly glances cast at Dorothy's slim figure in its hose and jerkin, but that was only at first arrival. For she drank the Rhenish wines with the best of them and shouted the rollicking songs of the day in a passable tenor until no doubt remained in the mind of anyone present that she was the spoiled son of some important nobleman. Eventually she became the center of any group they chanced to meet.

And when the night was far gone she would draw the slender sword she always wore and extol its merits to any who might yet be able to listen. A Spanish blade, she said it was, made in Toledo. Its like never had been seen in France before, although a century or so later it was destined to replace the clumsy two-handed swords which had been the weapon of the country since William the Conqueror hewed his way through Hastings.

"Ah, she is a graceful wench, my Toledo blade," Dorothy would croon, bending the long, needle-sharp thing between her slim white hands. "None can stand before her."

Sometimes she would induce a wandering swordsman to fence with her, almost always to his discredit, for the rapier slipped in and out between thrusts of the heavier blades with uncanny ease.

At first the girl handled her weapon somewhat clumsily, though with understanding, like one who was trying to force forgotten muscles into a well-remembered task. But as the days passed she began to show an almost uncanny aptitude.

As he stood in the drafty taproom while Dorothy and some puzzled opponent stamped and lunged inside a circle of shouting yokels, Gilbert marveled continually.

Here was a girl of steel, defying all the conventions of the time, when women were supposed to be helpless, fainting creatures who spent their days drawing mournful music from harpsichords or doing fancy-work in the quiet of some protected gallery. By all the rules he should have abhorred this hoyden who told screamingly funny risqué stories, liked her wine and treated him as a companion rather than a lover.

But he could not but admire her. The adoration which he had felt for the Dorothy of other days, before she had broken his heart by succumbing to the wiles of his handsomer, courtlier cousin, was that which an acolyte feels for a saint. This burgeoning passion which he felt now was something greater, and, he was sure, much finer.

But Dorothy would hear none of his talk of love.

"Enough time for that," she would reply, "when we have settled with Robert of the Black Heart, who spurned me for that Italian wench, the daughter of Count Guzzi. Such an alliance, he thought, would add more power to his duchy. We shall see.

"For the present you and I are friends only, Gilbert—two youngsters having a gorgeous jaunt through the springtime."

She looked at him closely, strangely, as if about to confide some secret, then shook her head.

"Ah, Gilbert," she continued, "you will not understand, but in the days to come remember I once told you that though the soul is sexless I do love you as a flower loves the sun. But for the present there is work to be done and God knows what thereafter."

She stedfastly kept their relations on a platonic basis. They rode together, drank together, once fought together when a gang of cutthroats waylaid them. At night they quite often slept in the same room, for accommodations were scarce. But, according to the old custom of the Crusades, Gilbert's sword always was laid between them.

And always she ignored his growing passion and tried to interest him instead in the efficacy of her long, vibrant rapier.

"For see," she explained, "your clumsy weapon is obsolete. It was fine for hewing through armor in the old-time jousts, no doubt. But my lady will slip between the joints of the finest chain mail with one-tenth the effort."

Gilbert shook his head stubbornly.

"A fine weapon for a girl, especially when she insists on going about the country in man's clothing," he admitted. "Quite fitted for a woman's strength. But I will have none of your knitting-needles. I want a sword that sings and will cleave a man to the breast-bone if need be."

"Aye, if need be," she mocked him, her pretty nose in the air. "But don't forget, my dear duke-that-is-to-be, a man will die just as swiftly and with much less mess if he is jabbed properly through the heart."

DELAY the journey as she would, the pair at last arrived on the outskirts of Orthow. News of their coming had, of course, gone before, and the peasants flocked to greet them.

Robert, they said, still was at Castle Orthow, swearing he was innocent and that he would hold his territory at all costs. But his troops, although they feared him too much to mutiny, would not lift a hand against the rightful heir, everyone was agreed.

"But why doesn't he escape to Italy, where he would be given sanctuary in Florence at least?" Gilbert wondered.

"Robin run away?" cried Dorothy. "That show's how little you know him. He is a scoundrel but never a coward. Robert knows we come alone. He thinks

if he dispatches you enough scapegraces will rally to support him so he can defy King Louis, especially if he can induce Count Guzzi to aid him. Well, he still has me to reckon with!"

"You will stay out of this," said Gilbert sternly. "My cousin is the best swordsman in France, since my uncle's death. I will not permit you to draw that silly weapon against him."

"Oh, very well," she sighed humbly. "I only hope he doesn't kill you, for he is the better swordsman. I'll come along to see that some of his scoundrels don't stab you in the back. Better get some heavy armor at the next village."

And, with an effrontery which made all his subjects devoted slaves from that day forth, Gilbert and his companion rode straight toward the gates of Orthow Castle.

It loomed, menacing and vast, against its snowy alpine background as they approached. The sun, although it was an hour before setting, had a dull luster which lighted the countryside with a reddish glare. Not a breath of wind moved. Not a bird chirped.

Evidently they were expected, for as they arrived the drawbridge was lowered and a single rider came slowly across the moat.

It was Robert.

"Good even, cousin," he said, a crooked smile showing under his dark mustache behind the lifted vizor of his helmet. "I suppose you have come to kill me.

"Good even, Lady Dorothy," he added, bowing over his horse's mane. "I hoped to see you in seemlier garb and in better company."

With those words his mighty sword came rasping from its shoulder scabbard. He spurred his horse forward. Gilbert did likewise. They met with the shock of an earthquake, sparks flying in the dim light as their weapons clashed. Both stood in their stirrups and hacked with a will but with little effect.

Then, as his horse, unaccustomed to such encounters, shied widely, Sir Gilbert received a buffet on the side of the head which sent him tumbling headlong. Luckily he was close enough to catch Robert around the middle as he fell and drag him to earth also.

Unhurt, both men leaped to their feet and resumed the conflict.

Dorothy, apparently unconcerned, also dismounted and stood outside the range of conflict, leaning on her sheathed blade.

The lurid light glinted on the armor and straining eyes of the combatants as they shifted ground, their spurred heels cutting the sward into shreds and sending up little puffs of dust.

Quickly it was borne upon Gilbert that he was no match for this demon in black. Again and again he just managed to evade a thrust or slash from the five-foot blade.

But he always claimed it was dew on the grass which brought his defeat. At any rate Robert feinted for the head, reversed, and, as his opponent staggered wildly in an effort to meet the new form of attack, drove his blade through the left shoulder. In the fading light the wound looked heart-high, but in fact it was not fatal, due to the fact that Gilbert had been almost on one knee when struck.

Without emotion Robert looked at his fallen foe and wiped his sword carefully on a handful of grass.

"I regret very much, my lady, that you should see this dirty work," he said, drawing his poniard, "but one needs must finish a task thoroughly. The varlet's throat wants slitting. If you will turn your face away——"

He did not finish. Leaping forward, Dorothy struck him across the face with the Spanish blade.

"Have at thee, Black Robin!" she cried,

"He who can not finish his work without a dagger had best hide himself in hell."

Robert laughed loud and long. "How now, my lady? Wouldst match thyself with the greatest swordsman in all France? But how the devil," he cried, his voice changing, "did you come by my uncle's sword?"

Without reply the girl lunged, the point of the rapier aimed straight at his heart.

Although off guard, Robert managed to deflect the blade with the hilt of his sword, receiving only a scratch.

"Well taught," cried the girl, her voice shrill with the joy of battle. "Now try this one!" She went from carte to tierce and when he parried widely returned to carte again. But Robert was too quick. She only pinked him.

"Splendid!" she jeered. "Duke Florian taught you well when as a boy he loved you and your black curly hair. Remember those long hours of practise in the courtyard. The duke trained you for a gallant life, Robin, but soon you will be worm-food the same as he.

"'Tis a pity you thought so much of your great sword that you would not take his advice and change it for a blade like this," she continued a little later. "See, you could have spitted me then had you a nimbler weapon." She leaped back and laughed at him.

Black Robert was perspiring and furious. Giving over his slashing tactics, he endeavored to match her fencing with lunges from his clumsy blade. Only his great strength made the thing possible, but he handled the twenty-pound sword as though it were a toy.

"Quick and brilliant, is it then?" cried the girl, leaping forward once more, a slim arm extended backward, the other keeping her weapon vibrating like a humming-bird's wing. "Very well, my charming rascal. Quick and brilliant it shall be. Do you remember that time attack which the old duke tried to teach you, but which you were just a little too clumsy to master properly? Let us try that."

Seated on the red sward, just outside the circling feet, Gilbert stopped his effort to staunch his wound and watched.

Stung to madness by Dorothy's words, bleeding from half a dozen slight wounds, Robert fell into her trap. As she thrust and lunged he did not parry, but endeavored to time her attack and deflect the point on the guard of his sword while his own point held steady to meet her as her body followed the lunge.

Then Gilbert saw a display of swordsmanship which in later days he delighted in telling of to his children and grandchildren. The speed with which the girl lunged was like that of light. Too late her adversary made that snap of the wrist which was supposed to catch the point. By a fraction of a second he lost. His blade flashed past her breast, never touching her, while her own went inside his guard and through him, heart-high and extended half a foot between his shoulder-blades.

Robert did not fall at once. He merely coughed slightly, and, as with a sharp tug Dorothy drew the blade away, a look of horror such as Gilbert had never seen in the eyes of man dawned on him.

"Who are you?" he whispered through a bloody foam which had crept to his lips. "Only one man in France could have done that to me—and he is dead." He swayed, but braced himself as he stared at her with eyes that started from their sockets. "Are you? You are——"

"Aye, Robin, thou ingrate, thou shouldst have taken warning," the girl answered softly, almost tenderly. "Did I not say I—would— return?"

Then, as the dying man, with his eyes still fastened upon her, crumpled slowly to the ground, Dorothy laughed.

W. T.—6

A great burst of laughter it was, higher-pitched but otherwise exactly similar to that which had made the dead Duke of Orthow famous throughout all France—mocking, debonair and unafraid of God or devil.

In the midst of that laugh Dorothy suddenly clutched her breast, reeled, flung out her sword to steady her. The frail metal bent into a bow against the sod—snapped. . . . She fell face downward upon the dead body of her foe.

The sun, which had been a great red simitar on the horizon, sank from view.

Gilbert staggered to his feet, his wound forgotten. Picking up the girl, he ran toward the open drawbridge.

Occupants of the castle, who had fought for places on the turrets to watch this strangest of battles, rushed out to meet him. As he fell fainting from loss of blood they caught the girl from his arms.

DOROTHY was not dead, although life fluttered within her as lightly as a butterfly's wing.

Even when Gilbert, his arm in a sling, was able to be up and about she lay, hardly breathing, staring at the ceiling of her chamber with great, dark eyes which seemed to be looking into far places and seeing unearthly things.

Gilbert watched over her day and night as she slowly gained strength. But it was not the daredevil hoyden who had ridden with him twice across France that finally returned to health.

Neither was it the fickle, soft girl, who at the beck and call of her mother had made tapestries or drawn mournful music from the harpsichord.

This was a woman, strange, quiet, unearthlily beautiful, who in later days was the despair of painters—a woman who gave the impression of having seen things which the living should not know, and of having learned secrets which made existence somehow unimportant and a trifle ridiculous.

She never spoke to Gilbert of their adventures together, seldom spoke at all unless it was necessary, but showed a sweetness and stedfastness of character which endeared her to the nurses and in time to all Mecklenberg and Orthow.

History says she and Gilbert finally were married by the good Father Bellaire and that later she bore many strong sons.

But as he sat before the fire on winter evenings, stroking the head of one of his fine dogs or merely staring idly into the flames while his wife rested with crossed hands beside him, thinking of God knows what, Gilbert would sometimes feel bitter tears rising to his eyes. For, after all, she was not *his* Dorothy.

The Haunted Chair

By GASTON LEROUX

A thrilling novel of murder by light-rays, murder by strange sounds, and murder by tragic perfumes—by the author of "The Phantom of the Opera"

The Story Thus Far

SUDDEN death struck two men in succession, Maxime d'Aulnay and Jean Mortimar, as they were making their speeches to the French Academy accepting election to that body. Each had been elected to the chair left vacant by the death of Monsignor d'Abbeville. Each had received a letter by special messenger just as he was about to begin speaking, and each had opened the letter and read its contents. Death followed within a few minutes.

Eliphas de la Nox, writer of books on the occult lore of ancient Egypt, had been a candidate for d'Abbeville's seat, but received only one vote. He had muttered after his defeat: "Evil be to those who sit in that chair before I do!" He had then disappeared, but the French newspapers blamed him for the deaths of those who had been elected to the seat which he coveted. They referred to d'Abbeville's seat as The Haunted Chair, and predicted that Eliphas would bring strange death to any who sought to occupy it.

Heedless of the threat, Martin Latouche accepted election to d'Abbeville's seat, but on the day he was to enter the Academy he was found dead in his study, bending over a weird hand-organ, which was grinding out the death tune that was used in the Fualdes murder to drown out the screams of the victim.

Gaspard Lalouette, a dealer in antiques, and officer of the Academy, examined the hand-organ, looking for a possible cause of death. He then made a night trip to the suburbs to interview the great scientist Lonstalot, seeking his advice as to what had caused the two murders. Lonstalot told him that the deaths were mere coincidences, and were the result of natural causes. On leaving Lonstalot's house, Lalouette was startled by a terrible scream in the night.

Learning that Eliphas is in Canada, Lalouette offers himself as a candidate for the vacant chair, but his courage evaporates when Eliphas returns and calls on him. However, Eliphas reassures him, and Lalouette proceeds to memorize the speech written for him by Hippolyte Patard, Secretary of the Academy; for Lalouette does not know how to read or write. His courage fails him again as he receives a letter from Eliphas; but he and Patard take the suburban train to make a friendly call upon Lonstalot, before Lalouette takes his seat.

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10. The Dungeon of Living Death

THEY couldn't find a taxi at the station, so they had to walk to Chennevière. Crossing the bridge just as night was coming on, they chose a short cut to the isolated home of the great Lonstalot —the road along the bank of the Marne. Lalouette stopped short suddenly and looked his companion straight in the eye.

"So, my dear Patard," he asked, "you don't really think they are going to murder me, do you?"

"Why, *they?*" exclaimed the secretary, who looked uneasy.

"How would I know? . . . those who killed the other men——"

"Well, to start with, who told you that

This story began in WEIRD TALES for December

"Murderers!" he yelled. "Murderers! . . . wretched thieves! . . . filthy jailers, prison-keepers of my genius!"

the others were murdered?" Patard asked, this time almost sulkily.

"You did."

"I? I said nothing of the sort. How could I, since I know nothing?"

"I'd like to tell you something, confidentially. I very much want to be a member of the Academy."

"But you are, sir."

"That's so," and Lalouette heaved a sigh.

They walked along the river-bank, Lalouette completely under the disturbing influence of a fixed idea.

"Still, I wouldn't like to be murdered!"

Patard shrugged his shoulders. This man he had taken for a hero but who was nothing but a scheming coward, was beginning to appear less admirable every moment. He decided to bring him up short.

"My dear sir, there are some situations in life that are worth the price of a big risk." And he thought to himself: "There, that will give him a jolt, perhaps!" As a matter of fact he was getting tired of Lalouette's whinings. No matter how difficult, musterious and even appalling the situation was, Patard thought any one was pretty lucky to be made a member of the

Academy — particularly a man who couldn't read!

Patard's veiled rebuke must have made his point, for Lalouette's gaze shifted to the ground. When he raised his eyes again, it was to ask the humiliating question, "Is it absolutely necessary that I deliver that discourse?"

The secretary looked at the deep and sullen waters of the Marne and then at Lalouette's crestfallen face. A sudden impulse seized him. Would it matter if he pushed him into the water—splash—just like that?

Instead Patard drew closer to the new member and took him gently by the arm. In the first place, Monsieur Hippolyte Patard was devoid of any criminal instinct, and then it suddenly flashed upon him that it would only mean a *fourth death* in the distinguished Academy.

The thought sent cold shivers up his spine. Then he knew what he would do. He would cheer up the good Lalouette. Taking him by the arm, Patard assured him of his sincere and undying gratitude. . . . In the hope of rekindling Lalouette's academic ardor, he talked to him of future glory. He described the triumph of the next day, the delirious crowds that would acclaim him. He melted Lalouette's heart when he painted an imposing picture of Madame Lalouette seated in her box receiving all the honors due her as the glorious spouse of the Man of the Hour.

Thus they walked along, cheering each other up, striving to appear brave and gay-spirited. They were even laughing aloud, when all of a sudden they realized that they had reached Lonstalot's iron gateway.

"Watch out for the dogs!" said Lalouette.

But the dogs were not to be seen or heard; more surprizing still, the gate was open.

Nevertheless, Patard rang the bell. Nobody answered. "Let's go in," he ventured.

"I'm afraid of those dogs," Lalouette repeated. "You go first."

They went up to the porch. No one to be seen in the garden, in the courtyard, in the house. They noticed a feeble gaslight in the hallway. They called out; they stood still awaiting an answer; not a sound. All the doors leading into the hall were closed.

There they stood, confused and anxious, staring at each other. Suddenly the house shook with a terrible clamor and a terrifying human shriek echoed through the night.

Patard's wispy forelock rose on his bald head. Lalouette leaned against the wall, trembling.

"That's it . . . that's the human cry I heard!"

Rigid with fear, Hippolyte Patard found strength enough to whisper, "It's the cry of some one who has been hurt. . . . We must go see. . . ."

But he didn't stir.

"No . . . no, that's the same cry. . . . I know it," said Lalouette in hushed tones, "I heard it before . . . listen . . . it's beginning again."

It came again, like a long-drawn-out groan, a distant wailing.

"It's downstairs . . . in the laboratory . . . some accident . . . perhaps something has happened to Lonstalot down there."

As he said this, Patard went farther into the hallway and took the narrow stairway leading down to the laboratory. The groaning continued, intermingled now and again with indistinct words which seemed to bespeak terrible suffering.

"I tell you, Lonstalot's met with an accident."

He went down the staircase, followed bravely by Lalouette; the weeping and the wailing persisted. When they opened the laboratory door the noises ceased; there was nobody to be seen.

Everything was in perfect order. Bottles, liquids, retorts, the large fireplace used for experiments, tables, shelves—everything was clean and neat and carefully put to rights. Not the slightest evidence of any trouble. Patard was baffled.

"That's very strange," said Lalouette. "Nobody's around."

"Not a soul!"

Suddenly the inhuman cry came again; they were almost taken off their feet with fear. It seemed to come from beneath the ground.

Patard pointed to a trap-door in the floor.

"There's where it comes from . . . some one must have fallen through."

He leaned over the trap-door; the groaning ceased.

"That's strange . . . here's a room I didn't know anything about . . . looks like another laboratory under the first one." Cautiously he went down, Lalouette close on his heels.

This subterranean laboratory was fitted up just as carefully and completely as the first one. But here everything was in great disorder as though some one had just been making some experiments and left before they were completed.

They looked all around carefully. Not a trace of a human being anywhere.

Suddenly, with a shriek of horror, both shrank back. A corner of the laboratory was separated from the rest of the cellar by a grating of iron bars. Back of those bars, like a wild animal in his cage . . . a man . . . yes, a man whose large, burning eyes glared at them in the silence.

The two men stood congealed with fear. The man behind the bars broke the oppressive silence.

"Have you come to save me? . . . If so, hurry . . . for I hear them coming back . . . and they will kill you like flies."

Still the two men stood as motionless as statues—and as silent.

"Are you deaf?" . . . If they see you. . . . There, I hear them. . . . The giant makes the earth shake. . . . They'll have the dogs tear you to pieces!"

As he spoke, they heard a furious barking which seemed to come from under the ground. Now they understood!

They looked around for a means of escape. And the man in the cage kept on moaning.

"Killed by the dogs . . . if they learn you have discovered the secret . . . the great Lonstalot's secret! . . . Ah! . . . Ah! . . . like flies . . . by the dogs!"

Patard and Lalouette, wild with fear, rushed toward the stairs leading to the trap-door.

"Not that way!" yelled the man. "Don't you hear them coming? . . . ah, there they are! . . . with the dogs!"

Ajax and Achilles had come into the house . . . it began to sound like Purgatory re-echoing with the howling of demons.

"How can we get out? How? Oh, how?" cried the two desperate men, while the man behind the iron bars swore at them and besought them to be quiet.

"Shut up! They'll get you just like all the others . . . kill you like flies . . . be quiet!"

The two men, almost certain they could see the savage jaws of Ajax and Achilles at the trap-door, rushed to the opposite side of the cellar toward the man's cage; it was now their turn to im-

plore him to save them . . . they even envied him!

They kneeled imploringly against the bars, and he grabbed them by the hair of their heads and shook them.

"Shut up . . . and let's try to save ourselves . . . listen . . . the dogs . . . Tobie is making them be quiet . . . he makes the earth tremble . . . but he suspects nothing . . . ah, what an idiot . . . you are lucky!"

He relaxed his hold.

"Listen . . . quick, quick . . . in the drawer of that table . . . a key!"

Both men rushed to the drawer and began to fumble in it nervously with trembling hands.

"A key . . . it opens the door . . . the dogs are chained . . . quick . . . look everywhere carefully . . . he puts it there every day . . . after he has fed me. . . ."

"But there's no key here!"

"Then the giant has kept it, the brute, Tobie . . . keep quiet . . . don't stir . . . ah! . . . there they are! . . . they're coming down! . . . listen . . . the giant is making the staircase creak. . . ."

Lalouette and Patard wheeled around.

"Don't lose your heads like that," whispered the prisoner . . . "listen . . . in the corners of the fireplace . . . one on each side . . . don't stir . . . soon they'll go to their dinner . . . if he sees you . . . he'll kill you, like flies, my poor, dear men, just like flies!"

In an agony of fear Patard and Lalouette remained hidden, each in his corner of the huge fireplace in the underground laboratory. Profound darkness enveloped them; they could see nothing; they could only gather what was going on by the sounds they heard.

First the staircase creaked and groaned as Tobie, the giant, came down.

"You left the trap-door open again, master," he said. "That will bring you bad luck . . . some time."

His heavy step went up to the cage where the man was imprisoned.

"Dédé took advantage of it to shriek at the top of his lungs. Didn't you, Dédé?"

"Of course he did," answered Lonstalot in his shrill voice. "I heard him when I was near the big oak tree just as I finally caught Ajax! . . . But at that hour there was no one in the neighborhood!"

"You never can tell," grumbled the giant. "You might have some callers *just like the other time* . . . the trap-door must always be kept closed . . . then everything is quiet . . . it's padded . . . you can't hear a sound."

"If you hadn't left the iron gate open, you old fool, and let the dogs out . . . you know very well they'll come back only when I call them . . . I never thought of the trap-door."

"Did you shriek, Dédé?" asked the giant.

But he got no answer. The man behind the iron bars was as still as death.

"The dogs are wild tonight," the giant went on. "I could hardly chain them, when they came back. I thought they would tear up everything in sight. *They acted just the way they did that night we found the three gentlemen standing here in front of Dédé's cage.* . . . The dogs had escaped that night, too, and we had to chase after them."

"Don't speak to me of that night, Tobie," said Lonstalot in his piping voice.

"That was the very night," the giant went on, "when I was sure something was going to happen to us . . . for Dédé had shrieked, and had kept on chattering with them . . . didn't you, Dédé?"

No answer.

"But they had bad luck," said the giant slowly, in his heavy voice. *"They are dead."*

"Yes, they are dead."

"All three dead."

"All three of them," the great Lonstalot repeated, like a sinister echo, in his cracked voice.

"It was just as though it had been done purposely," said the giant gloomily.

A sigh, half of terror and half of anguish, shook the two hidden men, whose trembling made the laboratory paraphernalia rattle.

"You heard?" asked Lonstalot.

"Was that you, Dédé?" said the giant.

"Yes," answered the man in the cage.

"Are you sick?" Lonstalot asked him. "Find out, Tobie, what's the matter with him. He shrieked terribly just a minute ago. Perhaps he's hungry . . . are you hungry, Dédé?"

"Listen," said the man in the cage. *"Here's the formula . . . it's completed . . . you ought to give me something to eat now. I've earned my supper."*

"Go take his formula and give him his supper," Lonstalot commanded.

The giant took it from Dédé and handed it to Lonstalot.

He examined it for a few seconds. "Marvelous," he said; "it's wonderful, Dédé. You didn't tell me you were working at this."

"I've been working at it for the last eight days . . . day and night . . . do you hear? . . . and there it is now, all finished."

Lonstalot gave a sigh. "What a genius you are!" he said.

"Has he discovered something else?" Tobie asked.

"He has . . . and he's been working it up into this beautiful new formula," answered Lonstalot.

To Dédé he said, "You're a real alchemist, my boy. What you've discovered here is something like the transmutation of metals. . . . You're quite sure of the experiment, Dédé?"

"I made three experiments with chloride of potassium . . . no one can now say that matter is unalterable. . . . I've discovered a really new potassium . . . has no likeness to the original. . . ."

"And does the same apply to the chloride?" asked Lonstalot.

"Yes, the same for the chloride."

"Marvelous!"

"And now what reward do you want for your trouble, Dédé?"

"I want some marmalade and a glass of good wine."

"All right, tonight you may have a glass of good wine. It can't do you any harm."

Then all of a sudden it was as though that relatively peaceful cellar began to rock with an underground tempest, a breaking forth of shrieks, lamentations, maledictions. Even in their terrible fright, the two visitors realized that Dédé was struggling like a savage beast behind his iron bars.

"Murderers!" he yelled. "Murderers . . . wretched thieves . . . filthy jailer, prison-keeper of my genius . . . you thief of a Lonstalot, you monster, whom I supply with glory and who rewards me with a piece of bread . . . your crimes will be punished, hear me . . . punished. . . . God will make you suffer . . . all the world shall know your evil deeds . . . somebody must come to save me. . . . *You shall not kill them all.* . . . I'll drag your wretched carcass about . . . by the skin of the neck. . . ."

"Stop! Stop! That's enough. . . . Make him stop, Tobie." The words rattled from Lonstalot's throat.

The iron gate grated on its hinges.

"I'll not shut up . . . do you hear? . . . by the skin of your neck . . . of the neck . . . no, no, not that . . . help! help! . . . yes, I'll be quiet . . . I'm quiet now . . . by the skin of the neck . . . to the scaffold! I'll keep quiet!"

Again the iron gate grating on its hinges, and in the deep shadowy cellar the weak groaning of some one falling asleep after a terrible outburst of anger . . . or of some one slowly dying.

11. A Flight Into the Night

LITTLE by little the cave-like cellar became deathly still. Huddled in their corners of the fireplace, neither Patard nor Lalouette gave the slightest sign of life. They flattened themselves against the wall so as not to risk being seen.

Then they heard the man in the iron-barred cage say, "You can come out now . . . they're gone."

Again only silence . . . again the voice, saying, "Are you both dead?"

Finally, from out of the flickering shadows of the laboratory-tomb, two outlines timidly appeared . . . first the heads, then the entire bodies . . . and then they stopped short.

"Don't be afraid . . . you can come out all the way," said Dédé. "They'll not come back tonight . . . and the trap-door is closed."

The two silhouettes moved forward again, but very cautiously, stopping at each step. Feeling their way with outstretched hands, they walked on tiptoe until they reached the dimly lighted cage. Dédé, standing up, was awaiting them.

They sank to their knees in front of the bars.

It was Patard who spoke first.

"Ah, my poor fellow!"

"We thought they were murdering you," said Lalouette.

"And you hid in the fireplace just the same?" the man asked. In a confused manner they tried to explain that their lips had refused to move; that they had never been so frightened; that they were scholars and not accustomed to such harrowing experiences; that——

"Scholars, hey? Members of the Academy, perhaps?" said the man. "One day three of them came here . . . three candidates making their official visits . . . the brigand found them here . . . I never saw them again . . . by listening to him and the giant, I learned they are all dead . . . he must have killed them like flies!"

All this was said in low, muffled tones, for the faces of the three were pressed close together against the bars.

"Sir," pleaded Lalouette, "is it possible to get out of this place without being seized by the brigand?"

"Certainly," said the man. "Take the stairway that leads directly into the courtyard."

"The key that opens the door to that stairway is not in the drawer," said Patard.

"I've got it here in my pocket. I took it out of the giant's pocket . . . that's why I made it necessary for him to quiet me down . . . so he'd come into my cage."

"You poor man," said Patard.

"Yes, I am to be pitied . . . they do some awful things to quiet me down."

"So you think we'll be able to get out of here, do you?" sighed Lalouette, worried because he hadn't yet seen the key.

"Will you come back and rescue me?" the man asked.

"You have our solemn promise."

"The others promised too . . . they never came back."

Here Patard spoke up in defense of the Academy's honor:

"They would have come back, if they hadn't died," he declared.

"That's true . . . he killed them just like flies. . . . But you . . . he won't kill you . . . he doesn't know you've come back . . . he mustn't see you."

"No, no," trembled Lalouette. "He must not see us."

"You'll have to keep your wits about you," said the man.

He passed the key through the bars to Patard, saying it would open a door behind a small dynamo in the corner. That door, he told them, opened onto a stairway leading to a small court back of the house. There they would find another door leading out to the open country—they had only to draw the bolt; the key of this door always remained in the lock.

"I learned this," said the man, "when the giant took me out for my walks."

"So you do get out of the cage at times?" said Patard, shivering at the man's fate and forgetting his own.

"Yes, but always chained. One hour a day in the open air . . . when it doesn't rain."

Meanwhile, Lalouette had stood at the stairway door, eager to leave. Suddenly he heard growlings coming from above. He started back.

"The dogs!"

"Yes, the dogs!" repeated the man, in a peevish tone. "I tell you you can't leave until I say so. You'll have to figure on an hour before Tobie begins to feed them . . . then you can get out . . . they're too busy eating to bark . . . they never pay attention to any one . . . when they're eating."

"We've got to wait a whole hour yet!" sighed Lalouette, cursing the day he first thought of becoming a member of the Academy.

"What's one hour? I've been here for years."

"We'll rescue you," they said, touched by his heart-breaking plight.

And as they looked at him their hearts melted in pity. His clothing was ragged and torn, but the rags were not tatters; rather they seemed to indicate a recent struggle during which the giant had beaten him.

Why, Patard asked himself, was this miserable creature caged behind iron bars? The Secretary of the Academy had known the great Lonstalot for many years. What was the meaning of those words they had just heard about a terrible crime? . . . strange chemical formulæ which the man concocted and passed on to the great Lonstalot? Lalouette saw the whole situation more clearly. He was sure that the great Lonstalot had shut this genius up in a cage; that it was he who created for the savant all the inventions which had spread his fame throughout the world. With his precise mind, Lalouette could picture their true relationship—on one side of the cage Lonstalot, holding up a piece of bread; on the other, the imprisoned genius with his inventions; all bargains made between the bars of the cage.

It was clear now why Lonstalot had to be careful that no one but himself should know anything about such a tremendously vital secret. The secret was more important than the lives of the three Academy members . . . alas! since a part of it had already been discovered it was reasonable to suppose that he would have to sacrifice two additional victims. Such is always the tangled web of crime.

And because all this was so clear to Lalouette he was in frenzied haste to see the last of this terrible dungeon where danger stalked in every corner. Why wait another hour?

PATARD wasn't quite so ready to agree with his friend's explanation of the horrible situation in which they found themselves. He was trying to clear up the mystery of the prisoner. He recalled the words old Babette had told him she heard from the lips of the dying Martin Latouche: "It is not possible; *that would be the most terrible crime in the world!*" . . . Yes, the greatest crime of all! Horror of horrors! Was Patard

himself now being forced to the same gruesome conclusion?

The prisoner sat behind his bars with his head in his hands—the picture of a man borne down by the weight of superhuman despair. A gas-jet jutted out from the wall so high above him that he couldn't reach it. Its faint flickering played so fantastically over the few objects in the dungeon that it looked like a devil's workshop—altogether awesome. Exaggerated shadows of retorts and burners danced up and down and across the walls; monstrous furnaces licked up their dying flames. The man lay like a heap of rags in the midst of all this alchemy.

Patard called to him several times; he did not stir. Up above, the dogs kept on growling, and Lalouette took care not to open the door.

Then the man under the rags moved slightly—it was as though a shadow with haggard eyes spoke these terrible words:

"The best proof that there is such a thing as the secret of Toth is *that they are dead!* One day he was so angry that when he came down here he made the whole house shake! And I shook too, believe me . . . for I said to myself, *'That's it again! He's going to make me invent something else now!'* Whenever he wants me to do something very difficult he begins by frightening me . . . so I do it just as a little child does . . . for fear he won't get his candy . . . what a ghastly life, isn't it? . . . But he's a thief . . . a brigand . . . that's what he is!"

The savage words rattled in his throat.

"Ah, he's kept dinning his secret of Toth into me! . . . into me, who didn't know a thing about it. . . . He told me that a charlatan declared that by means of that secret any one could be killed by the nose, the eyes, the mouth and the ears. He went on to tell me that compared with that quack, whom he called Eliphas, I was only a stupid donkey. He humiliated me in front of Tobie . . . I suffered terribly . . . what a two weeks that was we lived through! . . . I shall always remember it . . . and he wouldn't give me a moment's peace until I had turned over to him the *tragic perfumes,* the *sun-rays of death* . . . and the *murder-tune!* He seems to have known just how to use them, too."

The man let forth a hideous laugh; then he stretched himself out full length on the floor.

"How tired I am!" he sighed, "how terribly tired! But I have to have details. *I should like to know if any one saw the sun spots shine."*

Patard started. He recalled that strange description a doctor had given after the autopsy of spots found on Maxime d'Aulnay's face.

"Yes, yes, that's true," he whispered, "the sun spots."

"It was there, wasn't it? . . . it broke out on the face . . . it had to . . . that, my dear sir, is death by rays of light . . . it couldn't have been otherwise . . . it's like a rash . . . or rather as if there had been an eruption on the face . . . now the other one? . . . what was the matter with him? . . . because, you see, I need details . . . oh, I suspect that the brigand did something himself, because I heard him telling Tobie that *all three were dead* . . . naturally, in my position, I don't know the details . . . sometimes they talk in front of me and sometimes they don't say a word . . . ah, but that's a merciless thief . . . a brigand! . . . but the other one? . . . what spots did they find on him? . . . what was the matter with him?"

"I don't think they found anything," Patard answered.

"They wouldn't. The *tragic perfume* doesn't leave any trace . . . they didn't find anything with that . . . that's just put in a letter . . . the letter is opened . . . and while one reads the letter, one breathes

it in . . . that's all . . . that's the end of the person . . . but of course you can't kill everybody the same way . . . after a while there would be suspicions . . . he must have killed the third with——"

The howling of the dogs now seemed to be so near that all conversation ended. In the dungeon only the nervous breathing of the three men; outside the diminishing barking of the mastiffs.

"So they're not going to feed them this evening?" Dédé murmured.

Patard, whose heart had been beating to the bursting-point since he heard the atrocious revelations, had just breath enough to say:

"One, I think, had a hemorrhage . . . they found a spot of blood on the end of his nose."

"Heaven, oh heavens!" Dédé ground his teeth to give vent to his feelings. "That was death through the sense of hearing . . . it's always fatal . . . a hemorrhage within the ear . . . the blood must have been forced through the Eustachian tube to the back of the throat and then into the nose . . . all very plain, isn't it?"

The man sprang to his feet with the agility of a monkey. Indeed, one would almost have said he was one, as he leaped to his bars and clung there. Patard jumped back quickly lest the man seize him again by his few remaining hairs.

He dropped down again to his feet and, holding his head high, strode about in his dungeon.

"All this is very terrible," he resumed, "but even so, one must be proud of one's invention . . . it's a success! . . . it wasn't any make-believe thing I did there . . . it was *real death that I enclosed in light and in sound* . . . it gave me a good deal of trouble . . . but if one has the idea, the rest follows easily . . . the great thing is to have the idea, and I have plenty of ideas . . . ask the great Lonstalot. Oh, it doesn't take me long to bring an idea like that into realization . . . it's really magnificent!"

The man stopped short, raised his forefinger and went on: "You know that in the spectrum there are ultra-violet rays? These chemical rays act powerfully upon the retina . . . you have undoubtedly heard of accidental deaths caused by these rays . . . now listen carefully . . . perhaps you have seen those long tube-lamps, with a blinding greenish light, in which the mercury volatilizes? . . . are you listening or aren't you?" The man shouted so loud that Lalouette fell to his knees and pleaded with him to be quiet; Patard trembled.

"For pity's sake, not so loud!"

But the fright of his pupils in no wise disarmed the master. In a strong, clear, dominating voice he continued:

"These lamps with the volatilized mercury make a really devilish light. . . . Wait, I think I have one here."

He looked, but found nothing.

Above, the dogs refused to be quiet . . . they seemed to sense the presence of strangers.

"They'll not be quiet till they have their *bellies full of meat,*" thought Lalouette.

The man kept right on, proudly and emphatically: "Now, here was my idea—instead of using a glass, I took a *quartz tube,* which produced violet-rays of incredible force. Then I put the tube containing the mercury in a little dark lantern . . . one ray, just one single ray. And then, the power to deal death of my little dark lantern—which I made do what I wanted it to, thanks to an aperture permitting me to regulate the light—one ray, one single ray is enough. It strikes on the retina so powerfully that death is instantaneous . . . but you have to think of the death as being caused by the sudden stoppage of the heart-action . . . known as *inhibition* — just like death by *inhibition* which is brought about by a blow on

the larynx with the back of the hand. . . . That's all there is to it. . . . Ah, I was very proud of my little dark lantern . . . but he took it away from me and I never saw it again . . . never . . . it was a terrible lantern that kills people like flies! . . . that's just as true as that I am Professor Dédé."

PROFESSOR DEDE'S two pupils now consigned their souls to God, for surely between the dogs and the terrible little lantern they saw slight chance of escape. But Professor Dédé hadn't yet told them about his second invention, which gave him more pleasure than all the others—his dear little ear-piercer.

"All that, though, is nothing compared to my little ear-piercer," added the professor. As he spoke the hideous horror of a sure and immediate death congealed the souls of the Perpetual Secretary and the new member. "It's a very small box and you can stuff it in almost anywhere . . . even in an accordion, if you're clever enough and really know how to manipulate it . . . or in a hand-organ . . . in anything that plays . . . in anything, in fact, that strikes a false note."

Again Professor Dédé raised his forefinger.

"What is there, sir, more disagreeable to listen to than a false note? I ask you, but don't answer me . . . there is nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing so terrible!

"With my dear little ear-piercer, thanks to a better electric arrangement making the waves much swifter and more penetrating—yes, sir—than the Hertzian waves—with, I repeat, my little ear-piercer, I bore the false note into the ear-drum, make the brain, which is expecting a normal note, sustain such a shock that the listener falls dead, struck, so to speak, by a *wave-knife* at the very instant when the wave, carrying the false note, penetrates furtively and swiftly into the ear-canal. Ah, ha! what do you say to that? Nothing? Nothing at all? Neither do I. There's nothing to say . . . it kills men just like flies! . . . Still, it's all very annoying . . . for here I shall stay all my life watching people pass by who would come to my aid *if they weren't dead!* . . . If I were in their place I know what I would do."

"What? . . . what?" groaned the two unhappy visitors.

"I would wear blue glasses and stuff cotton in my ears."

"Yes, yes, blue glasses and some cotton," the two men repeated as they held out their hands like beggars.

"I haven't any," the professor said gravely; then he cried out:

"Listen! . . . footsteps! . . . perhaps it's the great Lonstalot with the terrible little black lantern in one hand and the dear little ear-piercer in the other. . . . Ah! . . . I wouldn't give a penny for your earthly existence . . . no, not a penny! . . . I've lost another chance . . . it will be just like all the others . . . you won't get me out of here. . . . *You'll never come back . . . never!*"

Now they could hear the footsteps just over their heads . . . going toward the trap-door . . . coming down the stairs.

Patard and Lalouette leaped up, fled toward the stairway, impelled by revived hope, a supreme yearning to live . . . they heard Dédé's voice behind them.

"I shall never see them again! . . . They will never come back!"

They had such a distinct impression that some one was opening the trap-door over their heads that instinctively they turned away, dropped their heads, shut their eyes and covered their ears with their hands.

It was too horrible . . . they preferred to risk being killed by the dogs . . . they opened the door and climbed up the stairway, hoping only to escape the *sun-rays*

of death or the *murder-tune*—not even thinking of the dogs.

When the two terror-stricken men came out into the court, they were vaguely aware that the dogs were no longer barking. They must be busy eating . . . no time to stop for barking.

Patard and Lalouette saw the door Dédé had mentioned, the one with the key in the lock. . . . They made one leap.

Then, dazed, they fled across the open fields . . . they ran like madmen, without knowing whither . . . straight ahead, in the darkness . . . stumbling, picking themselves up, leaping wildly ahead when they saw a ray of moonlight . . . a ray which perhaps might have come from the deadly little black lantern!

Finally, they stumbled onto the highway . . . a milkman was passing . . . they asked him to drive them to the station . . . exhausted and faint, they dropped into his wagon, explaining that they had been chased by two mad dogs.

At that very moment they heard the dogs howling hideously away off in the distance, in the deep night . . . they must have been unchained . . . must be trying to find the unknown visitors who had left the door open . . . probably the giant Tobie was now organizing a searching expedition.

When the train started off toward Paris Hippolyte Patard and Gaspard Lalouette drew their first long breath . . . they knew they were safe . . . the great Lonstalot would never know, would he? —until the moment of his final punishment—the identity of those men who had discovered his secret.

12. The Assassin Confesses

THE Rue Laffitte was black with people. At every window curious eyes were waiting to see Monsieur Gaspard Lalouette as he left his home to deliver his speech at the French Academy. The whole neighborhood was out for this great event. It wasn't every day that a dealer in antiques and oil paintings was elected a member of the Academy and the extraordinary circumstances surrounding his election had stirred every one's imagination. Eager not to miss a single detail, no matter how small, that might add to their "story," reporters wormed their way in and out of the crowds. The crowd had decided not only to give a rousing cheer to the new member as he left his home, but to escort him as far as the Pont des Arts—a decision they couldn't carry out, as a matter of fact, for no one had been able to cross the bridge for hours. In reality what they were waiting for was the news they were sure would come—*the news of another death.*

As Lalouette was so long in putting in his appearance, their anxiety grew stronger every moment, for the crowd had no way of knowing that since nine o'clock that morning the new member had been closeted with the Secretary in the Dictionary Room at the Academy.

What a terrible night those two men had passed and in what a sad condition they had returned to the little shop of Madame Lalouette's cousin in the Place de la Bastille! There, Madame Lalouette had joined them; and then had followed a serious discussion lasting several hours. Lalouette was all for calling in the police at once, but Patard by his tears and his eloquence dissuaded him. It was agreed that they must act with great prudence; that anything like a scandal must be avoided; that the Academy must in no way be dishonored. In this way Patard tried to make Lalouette understand that now that he was a member of the Academy, he had certain duties, certain responsibilities toward it. To which Madame and Monsieur Lalouette answered that, if so much glory was attended by so much peril, they didn't care to go any further

with the matter. But the Secretary pointed out that it was now too late to change their minds—that when one is an Immortal, it is until death.

"That's just what worries me," sighed Lalouette.

After all, now that they were sure the great Lonstalot was unaware of what they knew, the whole situation was more reassuring—much more so than before they knew how the other three candidates had met with death so suddenly. So the two men decided that in order not to be disturbed, they would lock themselves in the Dictionary Room so that no one could possibly get in, especially not the great Lonstalot.

And then they bought themselves some cotton and some blue glasses!

With the cotton in their ears and the blue glasses on their noses there in the Dictionary Room sat Hippolyte Patard and Gaspard Lalouette, waiting.

Only a few moments now, and that phenomenal memory of Monsieur Lalouette was going to serve the illustrious cause of letters.

Outside an impatient murmur began to be heard.

"The hour has come," said Patard suddenly, and taking his new colleague by the arm, he opened the door. But some one shoved past them roughly, then shut the door.

The two men stepped back, livid with fear.

The great Lonstalot stood glaring at them.

"So that's it," he said, a slight tremor in his voice. "So, now you're wearing glasses, are you, my dear Secretary? Ah! . . . and you, too, Gaspard Lalouette? . . . How do you do, Monsieur Lalouette . . . I haven't had the honor of seeing you for a long time . . . delighted, I'm sure."

Lalouette stammered out a few unintelligible words; Patard tried to get control of himself, for the moment was a serious one. The thing that worried him was that *the great Lonstalot was hiding something behind his back.*

He must look unconcerned—as though nothing was wrong. It was obvious that Lonstalot suspected something. He coughed a little dry cough, kept his eye glued to every turn the scientist made, and said:

"Yes, Monsieur Lalouette and I have just discovered that our eyes are a little weak."

Lonstalot took a step forward; the two men took two steps back.

"Where did you discover that? *Wasn't it perhaps last night at my house?*"

Lalouette felt himself getting dizzy. Patard denied it, deploring that neither he nor Lalouette had left Paris last night; that Lonstalot, the most absent-minded of men, doubtless didn't realize what he was saying.

The great Lonstalot sneered again, still keeping his hand behind his back.

Suddenly, to the terror of the two men, an arm came forward. Instinctively they adjusted their blue glasses and the cotton in their ears. They were sure they were about to gaze at the little black lantern and the dear little ear-piercer.

Instead, their eyes fell on an umbrella.

"My umbrella!" exclaimed Patard.

"You recognize it, then?" growled the scientist. "Your umbrella, which you left in the Varenne train. . . . A conductor, who knows me and you and has often seen us traveling together, gave it to me. . . . Ah! my dear Secretary, ah!" he cried triumphantly as he waved the umbrella fiercely. "So you think I'm so absent-minded, do you? Well, would I have left my dearly beloved umbrella on the train as you did?"

At that the great Lonstalot sent the

umbrella whirling across the room. It took several turns before it finally spent its force against the calm features of Cardinal Richelieu's portrait.

The scandalized Patard wanted to cry out against such a sacrilege. But one look at the terrified face of Lonstalot and the cry stuck impotently in his throat.

Lonstalot stood in the doorway waving his arms, looking like Mephistopheles trying to see if he could fly. Lightning seemed to flash from his face and both men thought the great scientist had gone mad. They were sure they were face to face with the devil himself.

"So . . . you pair of thieves!" he burst out at them. "Stealing my secret . . . you had to go down to the cave, did you? while I was away . . . just like the sneak-thieves you are . . . he should have cooked you alive . . . and the dogs should have torn you to pieces, killed you like flies! That's the way Dédé talks . . . you saw Dédé, didn't you? . . . a pack of thieves . . . take off your glasses, you fools!"

He stopped a moment to wipe the perspiration from his forehead and the foam from his mouth.

"Why don't you take off your glasses? . . . you have cotton in your ears, haven't you? . . . all that fiddle-faddle . . . all Dédé's nonsense! . . . that he invented all those things for me just for a piece of bread! . . . and the secret of Toth, yes? . . . and the rays that strike you dead! . . . and the dear little ear-piercer . . . all Dédé's prattle! . . . what didn't he tell you? . . . the poor dear fool! . . . poor dear fool."

Lonstalot sank onto a chair, sobbing desperately. The man who hardly a moment before seemed to them the greatest criminal on earth, now suddenly appeared infinitely pitiful. They were taken off their feet to see him sobbing like this, yet they went up to him with the greatest caution . . . and they kept on their blue glasses. Shaking in every part of his body, Lonstalot went on:

"The poor idiot . . . the poor child . . . *my* child . . . gentlemen . . . *my son* . . . do you understand, now? . . . my son is an idiot. The law allows me to keep him with me only if I keep him as a prisoner —one day they snatched from his hands a little girl he had almost strangled because he was trying to pluck from her throat something that made her sing well! . . . I must tell you . . . it's my only son . . . they want to take him away from me . . . they want to steal him and hide him from me . . . you have only to say the word and they'll steal my boy . . . thieves, all thieves!"

How he sobbed out the words!

Patard and Lalouette, speechless, looked at him, thunderstruck by his revelations and his despair. The mystery of the man behind the bars was explained.

But what about the three dead men?

Patard laid a timid hand on Lonstalot's shoulder.

"We'll not say a word," he promised. "But there were three other men before us who also promised to say nothing—and they are dead."

Lonstalot, still weeping, arose and spread wide his arms as though he wanted to embrace all the sorrow of the world.

"They are dead! . . . But don't you suppose I was more shocked than you were? . . . Bad luck seemed to dog my footsteps . . . *they are dead because they were not in good health* . . . what could I do about that?"

Going up to Lalouette, he looked straight at him.

"But you, sir . . . you tell me . . . you are in good health?"

Before Lalouette could answer, impatient colleagues crowded into the room,

trying to find the Secretary and the new member.

In spite of the cotton in his ears, Lalouette was well aware of and pleased by all the honors that were being shown him. He felt sure, after all that Lonstalot had told him, that he could go forth to immortality, quickly and with no regrets of any kind. But at the door of the auditorium he came face to face with Lonstalot himself! It occurred to him that before going any further he would take one last precaution. So, leaning toward the scientist, he said:

"You ask me if I am in good health . . . thanks, yes . . . excellent . . . I believe all you told me . . . but in any event I hope for your sake that I shall not die . . . I have taken the trouble to write out everything that we saw and heard at your house, and it will only be divulged immediately after my death."

Lonstalot looked at him questioningly and then said slowly:

"That can't be true, *since you can't read or write.*"

Lalouette could not in all decency turn and go back now. People had already seen him in the hall; deafening cheers had greeted his entrance. The sight of Madame Lalouette in a first tier box had given him a little courage, although Lonstalot had just struck him a terrible blow. He was still shaking. How did that man know he couldn't read? The secret had been more than carefully guarded; it couldn't have been Patard who had revealed it, and Eliphas was too happy to see in the Academy a man who couldn't read to miss his revenge by telling. Eulalie was a thoroughly trustworthy repository for secrets. How then? When? Perhaps, though, Lonstalot meant no harm by his reply; perhaps he was just a desperate, unhappy father . . . of course . . . so what had Monsieur Lalouette to be afraid of—especially with his blue glasses, and the cotton in his ears?

The honors and the glory heaped upon him by the admiring crowd revived his spirits. He tried to look as proud and triumphant as a Roman conqueror. And he succeeded. Especially as those blue glasses hid just a hint of anxiety in his eyes.

He saw right near him, very quiet and very sad, the great Lonstalot, lost in thought. That expression reassured Lalouette still more. So, just at the proper moment, he began his speech, very much at his ease; bending his elbow and turning the pages just as though he were reading them. His memory served him perfectly . . . it was very good . . . very good . . . so good in fact that he was reciting his eulogy and thinking of something else.

He was thinking, "But still, how does the great Lonstalot know that I can't read?"

All of a sudden he tapped his forehead and cried out in the middle of his speech:

"I have it! Now I know!"

At this unexpected gesture, this inexplicable cry, every one in the room rose and started toward the speaker, expecting to see him fall, just as the others had fallen.

But, clearing his throat, he said:

"It's nothing at all, ladies and gentlemen. I shall go right on . . . I was saying . . . ah, yes . . . I was saying that poor Martin Latouche, dying so prematurely——"

Now Lalouette was superb, calm, and perfectly sure of himself. He spoke of death with the calmness of a man who is never going to die . . . they applauded him deliriously . . . the women especially went mad; they drew off their gloves so that they could clap louder; they interrupted with little cries of praise and pleas-

ure. . . . He saw Madame Lalouette between two devoted friends, little streams of happy tears flowing down her cheeks. He went right on reciting his speech, and made it more effective with some gestures he inserted on the spur of the moment.

Here's the story of why he had cried out: "I have it! Now I know!"

"I know, because that day when I went alone to Varenne-St. Hilaire and when I fled from Lonstalot's house as though it were a madhouse, that very day I reached the station just in time to hop on the train back to Paris. There was a woman in the compartment shrieking like a peacock; she thought I was going to kill her. The more I tried to calm her the louder she screamed. At the next station she called in the station-master who reproved me for having entered a compartment reserved for 'Ladies Only.' He threatened me with arrest but fortunately I had with me my police identification papers, by means of which I could prove that *I couldn't read*. . . . Now, that station-master must be the very one who found Patard's umbrella and who gave it to Lonstalot. To Lonstalot's question as to my description, the station-master must have answered that Patard was traveling with the *man who couldn't read!*"

"Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Monsieur d'Abbeville was, like me, born of simple people. . . ."

At this point in Lalouette's speech a messenger crossed the room on tiptoe, a *letter in his hand*.

When the audience saw that letter, they thought it must be for the speaker and, as one man, they cried out:

"No . . . no . . . no letters! . . . don't open it! . . . don't let him open it!"

One piercing scream came from Madame Lalouette's seat. When Lalouette had turned his head toward the boy, he had seen the letter—and understood . . . *the most tragic perfume* was lying in wait for him, perhaps. Then he had heard the desperate cry from his wife.

He stood up on tiptoe, making himself as tall as he could, and, really dominating, at least with moral force, that frightened crowd, he pointed with a steady finger to the fatal letter and said:

"Ah, no . . . not with me . . . that

won't succeed this time . . . because *I can't read!*"

The hall rang with shouts of mirth, screams of laughter! There was a quick-witted man . . . full of courage and wit! *Didn't know how to read!* Adorable words! Lalouette's triumph was complete! His fellow members shook his hand with wild enthusiasm and the outburst of merriment.

His triumph was all the more complete because when all was over Gaspard Lalouette did not die and the man *who couldn't read* was able at last to take his place in d'Abbeville's chair without having been done away with in any way. The letter was not sent to Lalouette's home address. Madame Lalouette went home to find a husband very much alive and who seemed to her the handsomest of men.

A little later, a boy was born to them whom they named *Academus*.

As to the great Lonstalot, he met with a great sorrow. His son Dédé died. Patard and Lalouette were invited to the funeral, which took place at night, almost in secret.

At the cemetery Lalouette's attention was attracted to a very mysterious person. He kept walking up and down, with his eyes on Lonstalot. When the famous scientist knelt, the stranger approached and bent over him as though he wished to ask the reason for his sorrow. The man's face was invisible, for his hat was drawn down over his brow and a scarf was pulled up around his neck. All during the ceremony, Lalouette kept asking himself who it was, for the man's general appearance did not seem to him altogether unfamiliar. Finally, the man disappeared into the night.

Patard and Lalouette returned to Paris together—this time not in a compart-

ment for "Ladies Only" but in the "Smoker."

"Poor Lonstalot seems to be having a good deal of sorrow," said Patard.

"Yes, yes, quite a good deal," answered Lalouette, shaking his head.

A YEAR later, while on his way to the Academy, Gaspard Lalouette was crossing the Pont des Arts arm in arm with Hippolyte Patard. Suddenly he stopped.

"Look," he exclaimed, pointing, "the man with the scarf."

"Well?" said Patard, surprized.

"Don't you remember him?"

"No."

"That's because he didn't impress you as he did me . . . that's the man that didn't leave Lonstalot's side the night of the funeral . . . and I thought then I had seen him somewhere before."

Just then the man turned around.

"Monsieur Eliphas de la Nox!" cried Lalouette.

It was the wizard. He came toward them and shook hands with Lalouette.

"You here?" cried the latter. "And you've never come to see us. Madame Lalouette will be so happy to see you. Won't you come to dine with us quite informally some evening?"

He presented Eliphas to Patard.

"And what are you doing now, my dear de la Nox?"

"Selling my rabbit skins as usual, *my dear Academician,*" he answered with a quiet smile.

"And you don't regret not being in the Academy?" Lalouette asked.

"No, because you are there," Eliphas answered gently.

Lalouette took the words as a compliment and thanked him.

The Perpetual Secretary merely coughed.

Lalouette referred to the time he thought he had seen Eliphas at the funeral of Lonstalot's son.

"Yes, I was there."

"Did you know the great Lonstalot?" Patard asked.

"Not personally," he answered. "No, not personally, but I had occasion to find out about him at the time I was making an investigation for my personal satisfaction, relative to several strange deaths in the Academy."

Hearing that, the Secretary wished that the Pont des Arts would open up and put an end to a conversation which brought to his mind the most gruesome and painful moments of his usually placid life.

"Yes, I remember seeing you at the cemetery," he stammered. "Lonstalot sustained a great loss in the death of that son."

And Lalouette added:

"And his troubles are not over . . . we haven't seen him at the Academy since that cruel blow and he never comes to help us work on the Dictionary . . . ah, that was a terrible blow."

"Such a blow . . . such a blow," suddenly replied the *Man of Light,* turning his handsome, mysterious face toward the two trembling men. . . . "Such a blow . . . that since Dédé's death . . . he's never invented anything!"

And Eliphas de Saint Elmo de Taillebourg de la Nox turned his back to the Academy and disappeared across the bridge.

NOT until they reached the Secretary's office did Lalouette declare that his conscience would no longer let him guard a guilty secret. In vain Patard pleaded with tears in his voice to have nothing more said about the great Lonstalot. Lalouette would not listen.

"No," he cried, "it was Martin Latouche who was right. He was the one

who perceived the truth: *"There has never been a greater crime on earth!"*

"Yes, yes there was!" Patard burst forth. "Yes, there has been a greater one."

"And which is it?"

"The one of letting a man who can't read become a member of the Academy! I'm the one who's responsible for that crime."

And he added, trembling in holy fear, "But denounce me if you dare!"

A knock at the door brought them to their senses. Lalouette fell into an armchair and Patard went to open the door. The concierge handed him a registered letter, addressed, "Monsieur Perpetual Secretary, to be opened at a closed meeting of the French Academy."

Patard recognized the handwriting and trembled.

"What is it?" asked Lalouette.

In his excitement the secretary did not answer. With the letter in his hands, he paced up and down the room. Suddenly he stopped, looked at the letter, broke the seal and unfolded a thick manuscript, inscribed across the top, "This is my confession."

Lalouette, looking on, understood nothing of the deep emotion which moved Patard as he kept on reading and turning the pages of the mysterious manuscript. Gradually the color went from his face and he became as pale as the marble which one day would commemorate his immortal features on the threshold of the Dictionary Room.

Then, suddenly, Lalouette saw Patard throw the entire manuscript into the fire quite deliberately.

He stood before the hearth motionless, watching his little blaze burn completely out. Then he turned toward his accomplice and said, as he shook his hand:

"A truce, Monsieur Lalouette; we shall never quarrel again. You were perfectly right. The great Lonstalot was a scoundrel. Let us forget him. He is dead. He has paid his debt. But you, you, my dear Gaspard, when are you going to pay yours? It isn't very hard to learn—B A : BA, B E : BE, B I : BI, B O : BO, B U : BU."

[THE END]

The Horror in the Hold

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

A tale of the old adventurous days when Spain and England fought for the supremacy of the seas

THE Scourge of the Caribbees accepted his ill-luck with grim fortitude. The roar of the surf was loud in his ears as he dozed in his cabin, and for a time, at least, his ships were safe. "Hogs, hens' eggs, fish, cocos and aqua vitæ," he enumerated between his teeth. "Howbeit our sails are badly bruised we have victuals a-plenty. 'Tis well we came upon such a pleasant isle!"

The *Princess of Lubek* rose on a tremorless swell and the Scourge slept. But Pedro de Castro spoke to him in a sibilant whisper, albeit a stout deck and the length of the *Princess* separated the twain. "Bartholomew Mabbott," he murmured,

"there is nothing between you and the frying-pan but a little powder. Heretic, infidel—you will steam and sizzle in the Devil's furnace!"

The jewelled and painted head of the Spaniard swayed for a moment above the enormous quadrant by which the ship was steered and a lean, sun-browned arm waved in defiance. Then he lowered himself to the deck and crawled softly forward on his hands and knees. He crawled beneath the topmast and crouched in the shadows while the wind whistled eerily through the twisted rigging above his head. He waited for a luminous strip of moonlight to cross the lower section of the sterncastle. He waited patiently, for the night was young and time did not concern him. At length the cabin door stood out clear and sharp in the moonlight, and in a moment he was through it and descending a flight of crooked stairs in his naked feet.

He was a cumbersome figure of a man to look at, six feet three in height and broad of shoulder, yet he moved with the agility of a small lad. His swarthy face looked as if tropic suns had shone on it for centuries; his small eyes beneath enormous eyebrows suggested a savage and violent nature. He wore gold ear-rings and frayed breeches from which water dripped in a continuous stream. Wet clusters of thick black hair glittered weirdly on his nude torso.

Half-way in his descent he paused and glanced back over his shoulder. The silence had become almost too oppressive, but it gave him a curious pleasure to discover that no lurking shadows had blotted out the stars, which were still plainly visible from where he stood.

He chuckled and advanced less cautiously. Soon he was far down within the dim, shadowy hold, descending no longer by stairs but by rope ladders that swayed disastrously with every lurch of the ship. As he clung to the heavy cords the veins on his forehead swelled and fierce exultation shone in his small evil eyes. "A little powder will put Bartholomew into the frying-pan!" he mumbled maliciously.

A moment later he came to the end of the last ladder and hazarded a drop of five yards. He alighted upon his feet and found himself standing ankle-deep in a pool of greasy, ill-smelling bilge-water. "Curse these English ships," he muttered angrily, "they're not made for gentlemen!"

"Not made for Spanish dogs," said a voice at his elbow. He gasped and wheeled abruptly. Facing him in the sickly yellow light stood the dim form of a huge Englishman. As he stared in amazement his anger melted away and beads of sweat came out on his dark forehead. *"Madre de Dios!"* he blurted out. " 'Tis the Devil in person."

"Mayhap," said the Englishman after a pause. "But he is a loyal Devil who serves the Queen. If you advance another step he will rive you in twain. Faith, 'twould be an act of charity to kill you!"

Pedro lowered his eyes and studied the blade which rested above his heart. It was a sharp blade and the hand which held it did not tremble. "A brave fellow," thought Pedro, "but easily duped. Perhaps if I can addle his wits he will sizzle with Bartholomew."

A look of savage cunning came into the Spaniard's eyes. He swallowed hard and when he spoke again his voice was steady. "Will you fight me?" he asked.

A heavy silence fell, during which Pedro waited with a chilling spine for his enemy's reply. For moments that seemed interminable the latter stood stiff and alert, and it was obvious that he was torn by conflicting emotions. The air was choked with whirling dust and far back in the hold a small candle guttered and flared. At last the Englishman spoke:

"No, I will not fight you. You are a vile spy and Master Mabbott will cut off your ears!"

Pedro made a furious grimace. "Have it your own way," he snarled, "but I would have killed you." Almost immediately he regretted his bravado. A fearful burning in his shoulder warned him that his tall adversary was not to be trifled with. He raised his hand to the wound and groaned.

The Englishman's mocking laugh smote painfully on his ears. "The dog isn't as brave as I thought he was. 'Tis excessively foolish to whimper so over a little wound."

The taunt so infuriated Pedro that he threw caution to the winds. In the twinkling of an eye he ducked and butted his enemy squarely in the stomach with his head. It was a ludicrous, almost childish trick, but it took the latter by surprize. He fell back and had barely time to recover his balance when Pedro rushed violently upon him.

The two giants grappled and fell forward upon the wet planks. Pedro pummelled his enemy's face until his wrists ached and his knuckles were bruised and bleeding. Then he reached for his knife. The Englishman raised himself slightly, his fingers clutching at lacerated flesh, but Pedro's hand was nimble as a mouse to clutch the knife which rested beneath his breeches. In a moment he had it out and was using it with terrible effect.

The struggle lasted scarcely a minute. Pedro's arm rose and fell and he breathed hard. At the last the Englishman raised a horrible yell and his head fell forward. For several minutes Pedro crouched in silence above the dead man, and then, with an oath, he stood up.

He stood up and wiped his dripping weapon on the seat of his breeches. The blade glittered evilly in the yellow light. "The poor fool has preceded Bartholomew into the frying-pan," he chuckled. " 'Tis perhaps well that the good captain should have a comrade to listen to his groans."

PEDRO took his enemy's body upon his shoulder and carried it into the oblong shadows cast by huge barrels as heavy as stone. He threw it down with a grunt of execration. He lifted pious eyes to the slanting black boards above him. "May all heretics perish!" he cried and shook his fist in a mighty fury. "May Bartholomew Mabbott's life be cut short! May his body burn!" He sacrificed caution to anger and raised his voice in terrible imprecations.

Finally, however, his anger subsided and there began for him a hectic search. He clambered hysterically over barrels and prying off lids poked with his fingers into their smelly contents, led on by a curious sense of anticipation. The wound in his shoulder bled profusely and sweat streamed from his forehead, but he did not cease his efforts until his hand had sunk into something soft that ran like grains of sand through his fingers when he lifted them. Then he fell a-blubbering and cried out that Bartholomew Mabbott would assuredly fry. He had discovered it at last, the El Dorado of his vengeance: a cask full of fine, white powder.

He withdrew several paces and prepared his fuse. He worked now with all possible speed. He would make the fuse very long, since he did not want the explosion to occur until he had put a considerable distance between himself and the ship. An ugly thought crossed his mind. What if they caught him as he was about to slip into the water?

Carramba! but it is not pleasant to be discovered in such enterprises! He could hear footsteps passing rapidly back and forth above his head. What if they were even now waiting on deck to surprize

him? He must make the fuse so long that he would have time to explain what he had done and save the ship in the event of his capture. They would hang him, of course, but thoughts failed him when he tried to visualize the lively horror of what would happen if the cask should explode before he could escape or confess.

He passed a lean hand over his forehead and coughed uneasily. "Only a madman," he reflected, "would expose himself to such dangers for the sake of destroying a few English murderers."

But never mind, he would go through with it, and perhaps, in Spain, the King would speak high words to him and pinch his ear. Men had been made grandees for less. It was surely a splendid service to destroy such scoundrels and heretics as Bartholomew Mabbott and his thrice-accursed crew. Yes, he would certainly receive his reward. It was unfortunate that all the world could not be witnesses of his valor.

He had the fuse in place and was bending to light it when he heard steps on the wet planks. He was too astonished at first to move, but when the steps drew very near he raced forward, secured the slain man's sword and crawled into a crevice between two barrels. By dint of repeating to himself that he could never be captured he silenced the clamorous beating of his heart. As he crouched in the blackness his face had an evil look.

For a moment there was silence, and then drunken voices were raised in revelment:

"The Dragon of England is Lord of the Main;
'Tis hard on the cowardly pirates of Spain!"

"Fools!" Pedro whispered fiercely. "Since the defeat of the great Sodonia they have grown big with pride. If they but knew how near they are to the frying-pan——"

A shadow fell athwart the barrels between which Pedro crouched. Presently three men stood on the slippery planks and laughed crazily. They held goblets in their hands and their lean, scarred faces were flushed with wine. It was obvious that they did not suspect Pedro's presence. The wrinkles about the Spaniard's eyes grew in volume. He laughed silently to himself. "Drunken pigs," he thought. "I shall splice them upon a sword if they make trouble." His brain throbbed with intensity of hate. He was in the temper to destroy anyone who might discover him. The wound in his shoulder burned fearfully, but he ignored the pain.

For a long minute the men laughed and cursed and slapped one another upon the back. Apparently they feared nothing, but Pedro smiled as he thought of the grains of powder in the cask that would put the Scourge of the Caribbees into the frying-pan.

He was an astounding man, this Pedro. He crouched in the long shadows and smiled as the men before him cursed the ships of Spain and praised the Dragon of England. " 'Tis the Dragon will defend us," they said, and their teeth knocked together with excitement. "Never yet has the Dragon forsaken his own. For a thousand years he will rule the sea!"

PRESENTLY, for they had drunk heavily, they tottered so that they could scarcely stand, and searched about for a place to repose their unsteady bodies. Then it was that Pedro tightened his grip upon the Englishman's sword and crept cautiously forward.

As he left the shadows he became aware that the leanest of his enemies had collapsed against a barrel and lay tittering idiotically. But one remained standing directly before the barrels, making childish play in the air with his sword, and when he sighted Pedro he gave a cry of

amazement and anger and flung himself forward.

Pedro stepped warily aside and laughed outright. The big man snorted with rage and throwing caution to the winds came at Pedro like a charging bull. Again Pedro sidestepped. Too late the Englishman endeavored to arrest himself in his headlong flight. Before he could recover his balance the point of his sword was buried in a stout wooden cask, and the Spaniard was at his back.

As Pedro hacked at the bewildered man he marvelled that English dogs were so easily vanquished. Twice he ran his enemy through the body, and when the latter fell upon his face with a horrible moan and lay still exultation grew rapidly upon him.

As he sprang at the second Englishman a tremor of hate went through his body. "I shall kill you!" he shouted, and delivered a lunge with lightning speed. The giant before him seemed suddenly to awaken from a dream. He flung his arm out to defend himself and Pedro's blade flashing in an arch cut off one of his fingers. The Englishman gave vent to a dreadful shriek and drew his sword.

Pedro's heart leaped with joy as he gazed into the eyes of fury before him, but he did not let an anticipation of victory affect his swordplay. He saw at once that this second man was a more formidable adversary and accordingly he fenced with all his skill.

There was the harsh ring of clashing blades as the two men circled about between the barrels. Hilt to hilt they fought and parried and their eyes emitted little sparks as they advanced and retreated.

For several moments the tall man held his own, meeting Pedro's thrusts with adequate parries and occasionally a stiff counter-thrust; and then he began to give ground. Slowly he fell back under the ferocity of Pedro's attack. The Spaniard was quick to follow up his advantage and in a moment he had the Englishman completely at his mercy.

"Prepare to die," he shouted, and cut viciously beneath his opponent's guard. The tall seaman dropped his sword and groaned. Then, falling upon his knees he begged for mercy. He was a pitiful spectacle as he cringed and cowered in the ill-lighted hold, but Pedro's heart held no charity. With a sudden wide movement of his arm he sent the other sprawling, and a torrent of vile abuse poured from his lips. Then he struck, laying his enemy stark dead at his feet with the blood pouring from a great gash in his forehead.

Pedro laughed uproariously and stepped deftly aside. As he approached his last victim his eyes strayed over the man's swollen and bloated face, closed eyes and open mouth, from which issued the sounds of labored breathing. "I shall deepen his slumber," he murmured. Still laughing, he raised his sword and rained cuts upon the sleeper's head and shoulders. The limp form sprang into life with heart-breaking shrieks, and what followed was the foulest butchery.

At last Pedro's arm grew tired and a sudden weariness beset him. The wound in his shoulder pained prodigiously. He sat down on the nearest barrel and wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. For a moment he sat and panted in the semi-darkness, while his eyes surveyed the horror he had wrought. Pedro was fastidious in all things and the sight of his victims appalled him.

The shadows about him seemed to

deepen. He shivered and regarded the fuse, which was clearly visible from where he sat. His eyes regarded it with fearful contemplation. He had only to ignite the end of it and the Scourge would go into the frying-pan.

He rose unsteadily to his feet and staggered forward. The wound in his shoulder caused him exquisite torture. He picked the end of the fuse up and held it for a moment clutched tightly in his sweaty palm. Then he struck his flint.

Suddenly, something moved in the gloom behind him. He strove to ignite the end of the fuse, but his fingers trembled so violently that he could not control them. While he remained thus, shivering with fright, two eyes rose above the barrel on his left and regarded him steadily.

It was unfortunate, perhaps, that Pedro should have turned his head at that moment, for pain and fear had robbed him of all caution. When he saw the eyes he shrieked and shrieked again, and then delirium fastened on his tired brain.

Clutching his left shoulder he crawled hysterically forward on his knees, hurling curses at the thing that crouched in the gloom above him. For a moment the eyes disappeared, and then a long, scaly body came into view supported by webbed limbs that raced forward with incredible rapidity.

"The Dragon of England!" yelled Pedro. "Heaven pity my poor soul!"

Great jaws yapped wide, revealing a row of conical teeth, and a piercing scream came from the shadows as they fastened voraciously upon soft human flesh. There followed a moment of silence, and then, from somewhere in the darkness behind huge barrels there arose the unmistakable sound of bones cracking, cracking beneath a horrible pressure.

The Scourge of the Caribbees awoke from a dream of a pleasant isle and sat up. A tall negro stood before him, quaking in every limb. "Master," he groaned. "Four of our men have been foully murdered!"

Bartholomew swallowed hard and rubbed his eyes. "Murdered!" he gasped. "Who—who——"

The tall negro shuffled his feet. "We couldn't find the body, master. There were only a few odds and ends left. But we saved two ear-rings and some hair, and it looks as if he was a Spaniard."

"But who killed *him?*" asked Bartholomew and shivered slightly.

"The queer-looking monster we caught on the beach this morning," replied the negro. "The big scaly monster that you were bringing back to show Her Majesty. You forgot to feed him and mayhap he was hungry. I don't think he likes Spaniards."

The Scourge scratched his ear and a grin of satisfaction spread athwart his massive face. "See if there is a Spanish ship in the bay," he thundered. "We'll give them a dose of salt to season their vileness. And as for that monster—treat him with respect! Deny him nothing, and if he is hungry we have victuals a-plenty—hogs, hens' eggs, fish, cocos and aqua vitæ. Depend upon it, we shall not permit him to starve!"

The negro laughed and disappeared through the cabin door. Bartholomew Mabbott dressed reflectively. "There was enough powder in the hold to blow us to atoms!" he murmured. "'Tis as if St. George had protected us!"

Far down within the ship a fat crocodile blinked contentedly and dozed over his victuals.

The Wolf-Leader*

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The Story Thus Far

THIBAULT, a French shoemaker, lived alone in a forest near Villers-Cotterets on the estate of the Baron of Vez. A good-looking man in his late twenties, Thibault had seen just enough of the world to make him discontented with his own station in life.

The Baron of Vez was an ardent huntsman. Following a stag one day, his dog pack lost the scent near Thibault's hut. Thibault sought to obtain the stag for himself, by poaching, but was found out, and escaped a severe whipping only by the intervention of a girl, Agnelette. The girl told Thibault quite frankly, after the Baron departed, that she wished to marry, and Thibault engaged himself to her.

But Thibault's rancor against the Baron was so great that he was willing to go to any length to get even with him. He had carelessly called upon the Devil to give the stag to him, and to his astonishment he found the stag tied inside his hut when he went home that night.

But the stag was a mild surprize in contrast to Thibault's second visitor, a huge black wolf that appeared in the hut in a very mysterious way. When the shoemaker raised a hatchet with an idea of killing the wolf, he was dumfounded to hear the beast speak. The strange creature gave Thibault to understand that the Devil was of a mind to bargain and would grant the man's desires in return for hairs from his head, one for the first wish, two for the second, four for the third and so on, doubling the number for every wish granted. The wolf then gave Thibault a ring in exchange for one the shoemaker was wearing, and the unholy pact was complete.

Thibault's ambition fired by the black wolf's promises, the shoemaker determined to forget Agnelette and marry Madame Polet, the wealthy young widow who owned the mill at Croyolles. But he found that Madame Polet was enamored of another, and in his rage he behaved so badly that she ordered the servants to put him out. Thibault escaped up a steep hillside where the servants could not follow. "What can we do against a werewolf?" they asked their mistress.

Going home through the forest, Thibault was alarmed when a pack of wolves surrounded him, but he soon discovered

*This remarkable werewolf novel, by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, is not included in the published collections of Dumas' works in English, and will therefore be new to our readers, except those who have had the good fortune to read the story in the original French.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for August

that they were friendly. That night and subsequent nights they formed a guard around his hut, even hunting for deer and bringing him venison to eat.

One lock of Thibault's hair was now entirely red, but his envy of the nobility made him resolve to use his satanic power to the utmost, even if all his hair should be claimed by the Devil's color.

Returning from one of his escapades, guarded by his wolves, Thibault witnesses the wedding procession of his lost love, Agnelette, who marries Engoulevent, one of the retainers of the Baron of Vez. Maddened by jealousy, he drowns his sorrow in drinking at an inn.

Returning to his cabin, he is nearly run down by the Lord of Vauparfond, and expresses the wish that he might change places with the Lord of Vauparfond for twenty-four hours. No sooner has he uttered the wish than it is granted. Dragging into the hut his own body, into which the soul of the Lord of Vauparfond has been temporarily placed, Thibault in the body and clothes of the nobleman goes to keep an assignation with the Countess of Mont-Gobert. He is surprized by the Count and fatally wounded in a duel.

The twenty-four hours are up, and he and the Lord of Vauparfond exchange bodies just one minute before the Baron expires.

CHAPTER 19

The Dead and the Living

At the same moment that the trembling soul of the young Baron passed away, Thibault, awaking as if from an agitated sleep full of terrible dreams, sat up in his bed. He was surrounded by fire; every corner of his hut was in flames. At first he thought it was a continuation of his nightmare, but then he heard cries of "Death to the wizard! Death to the sorcerer! Death to the werewolf!" And he understood that some terrible attack was being made upon him.

The flames came nearer, they reached the bed, he felt their heat upon him; a few seconds more and he would be burned alive in the midst of the flaming pile. Thibault leaped from his bed, seized his boar-spear, and dashed out of the back door of his hut. No sooner did his enemies see him rush through the fire and emerge from the smoke than their cries of "Death to him!" "Death!" were redoubled. One or two shots were fired at him; Thibault heard the bullets whiz past; those who shot at him wore the livery of the Grand Master, and Thibault recalled the menace of the Lord of Vez, uttered against him a few days before.

He was then beyond the pale of the law; he could be smoked out of his hole like a fox; he could be shot down like a buck. Luckily for Thibault, not one of the bullets struck him, and as the circle of fire made by the burning hut was not a large one, he was soon safely beyond it, and once again in shelter of the vast and gloomy forest, where, had it not been for the cries of the menials who were burning down his house, the silence would have been as complete as the darkness.

He sat down at the foot of a tree and buried his head in his hands. The events of the last forty-eight hours had succeeded each other with such rapidity that there was no lack of matter to serve as subjects of reflection to the shoemaker.

The twenty-four hours, during which he had lived another existence than his own, seemed to him like a dream; so much so, that he would not have dared to take his oath that all this recent affair between the Baron, and the Countess Jane, and the Comte de Mont-Gobert had really taken place. The church clock of Oigny struck ten, and he lifted his head. Ten o'clock! and only half an hour before he

had been still in the body of the Baron Raoul, as he lay dying in the house of the Curé of Puiseux.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "I must find out for certain what has happened! It is not quite three miles to Puiseux and I shall be there in half an hour; I should like to ascertain if the Baron is really dead." A melancholy howl made answer to his words; he looked round; his faithful body-guards were back again; he had his pack about him once more.

"Come, wolves! Come, my only friends!" he cried. "Let us be off!" And he started with them across the forest in the direction of Puiseux.

The huntsmen of the Lord of Vez, who were poking up the remaining embers of the ruined hut, saw a man pass, as in a vision, running at the head of a dozen or more wolves. They crossed themselves and became more convinced than ever that Thibault was a wizard. And anybody else who had seen Thibault, flying along as swiftly as his swiftest wolf, and covering the ground between Oigny and Puiseux in less than a quarter of an hour, would certainly have thought so too.

He stopped at the entrance to the village, and turning to his wolves, he said:

"Friend wolves, I have no further need of you tonight, and indeed I wish to be alone. Amuse yourselves with the stables in the neighborhood, I give you leave to do just what you like; and if you chance to come across one of those two-footed animals called men, forget, friend wolves, that they claim to be made in the image of their Creator, and never fear to satisfy your appetite." Whereupon the wolves rushed off in different directions, uttering howls of joy, while Thibault went on into the village.

THE Curé's house adjoined the church, and Thibault made a circuit so as to avoid passing in front of the cross. When he reached the presbytery, he looked in through one of the windows, and there he saw a bed with a lighted wax candle beside it; and over the bed itself was spread a sheet, and beneath the sheet could be seen the outlines of a figure lying rigid in death.

There appeared to be no one in the house; the priest had no doubt gone to give notice of the death to the village authorities. Thibault went inside, and called the priest, but no one answered. He walked up to the bed. There could be no mistake about the body under the sheet being that of a dead man. He lifted the sheet. There could be no mistaking that the dead body was that of Raoul de Vauparfond. On his face lay the still, unearthly beauty which is born of eternity. His features, which in life had been somewhat too feminine for those of a man, had now assumed the somber grandeur of death. At the first glance you might have thought he only slept; but on gazing longer you recognized in that immovable calm something more profound than sleep. The presence of one who carries a sickle for scepter and wears a shroud for mantle was unmistakable, and you knew King Death was there.

Thibault had left the door open, and he heard the sound of light footsteps approaching; at the back of the alcove hung a serge curtain, which masked a door by which he could retreat, if necessary, and he now went and placed himself behind it. A woman dressed in black and covered with a black veil paused in some hesitation at the door. The head of another woman passed in front of hers and looked carefully round the room.

"I think it is safe for Madame to go in; I see no one about, and besides, I will keep watch."

The woman in black went in, walked slowly toward the bed, stopped a moment to wipe the perspiration from her fore-

head, then, without further hesitation, lifted the sheet which Thibault had thrown back over the face of the dead man; Thibault then saw that it was the Countess.

"Alas!" she said, "what they told me was true!"

Then she fell on her knees, praying and sobbing. Her prayer being ended, she rose again, kissed the pale forehead of the dead, and the blue marks of the wound through which the soul had fled.

"Oh my well beloved, my Raoul," she murmured, "who will tell me the name of your murderer? Who will help me to avenge your death?" As the Countess finished speaking, she gave a cry and started back; she seemed to hear a voice that answered, "I will!" and something had shaken the green serge curtain.

The Countess, however, was no chicken-hearted woman; she took the candle that was burning at the head of the bed and went and looked behind the curtain; but no creature was to be seen, a closed door was all that met her eye. She put back the candle, took a pair of gold scissors from a little pocket case, cut off a curl of the dead man's hair, placed the curl in a black velvet sachet which hung over her heart, gave one last kiss to her dead lover, laid the sheet over his face, and left the house. Just as she was crossing the threshold, she met the priest, and drawing back, drew her veil more closely over her face.

"Who are you?" asked the priest.

"I am Grief," she answered, and the priest made way for her to pass.

THE Countess and her attendant had come on foot, and were returning in the same manner, for the distance between Puiseux and Mont-Gobert was not much more than half a mile. When about halfway along their road, a man, who had been hiding behind a willow tree, stepped forward and barred their further passage. Lisette screamed, but the Countess, without the least sign of fear, went up to the man, and asked: "Who are you?"

"The man who answered 'I will' just now, when you were asking who would denounce the murderer to you."

"And you can help me to revenge myself on him?"

"Whenever you like."

"At once?"

"We can not talk here very well."

"Where can we find a better place?"

"In you own room, for one."

"We must not enter the castle together."

"No; but I can go through the breach in the park wall: Mademoiselle Lisette can wait for me in the hut where Monsieur Raoul used to leave his horse; she can take me up the winding stair and into your room. If you should be in your dressing-room, I will wait for you, as Monsieur Raoul waited the night before last."

The two women shuddered from head to foot.

"Who are you to know all these details?" asked the Countess.

"I will tell you when the time comes for me to tell you."

The Countess hesitated a moment; then, recovering her resolution, she said:

"Very well then; come through the breach; Lisette will wait for you in the stable."

"Oh! Madame," cried the maid, "I shall never dare to go and bring that man to you!"

"I will go myself then," said the Countess.

"Well said!" put in Thibault. "There spoke a woman worth calling one!" And so saying he slid down into a kind of ravine beside the road, and disappeared. Lisette very nearly fainted.

"Lean on me, Mademoiselle," said the Countess, "and let us walk on; I am an-

xious to hear what this man has to say to me."

The two women entered the castle by way of the farm; no one had seen them go out, and no one saw them return. On reaching her room, the Countess waited for Lisette to bring up the stranger. Ten minutes had elapsed when the maid hurried in with a pale face.

"Ah! Madame," she said, "there was no need for me to go to fetch him."

"What do you mean?" asked the Countess.

"Because he knew his way up as well as I did! And oh, Madame! If you knew what he said to me! That man is the devil, Madame, I feel sure!"

"Show him in," said the Countess.

"I am here!" said Thibault.

"You can leave us now, my girl," said the Countess to Lisette. The latter quitted the room and the Countess remained alone with Thibault. Thibault's appearance was not one to inspire confidence. He gave the impression of a man who had once and for all made up his mind, but it was also easy to see that it was for no good purpose; a satanic smile played about his mouth, and there was a demoniacal light in his eyes. He had made no attempt to hide his red hairs, but had left them defiantly uncovered, and they hung over his forehead like a plume of flame. But still the Countess looked him full in the face without changing color.

"My maid says that you know the way to my room; have you ever been here before?"

"Yes, Madame, once."

"And when was that?"

"The day before yesterday."

"At what time?"

"From half-past ten till half-past twelve at night."

The Countess looked steadily at him and said:

"That is not true."

"Would you like me to tell you what took place?"

"During the time you mention?"

"During the time I mention."

"Say on," replied the Countess, laconically.

Thibault was equally laconic.

"Monsieur Raoul came in by that door," he said, pointing to the one leading into the corridor, "and Lisette left him here alone. You entered the room by that one," he continued, indicating the dressing-room door, "and you found him on his knees. Your hair was unbound, only fastened back by three diamond pins; you wore a pink silk dressing-gown, trimmed with lace, pink silk stockings, cloth-of-silver slippers and a chain of pearls round your neck."

"You describe my dress exactly," said the Countess. "Continue."

"You tried to pick a quarrel with Monsieur Raoul, first because he loitered in the corridors to kiss your waiting-maid; secondly, because some one had met him late at night on the road between Erneville and Villers-Cotterets; thirdly, because, at the ball given at the Castle, at which you yourself were not present, he danced four times with Madame de Bonneuil."

"Continue."

"In answer to your accusations, your lover made excuses for himself, some good, some bad; you, however, were satisfied with them, for you were just forgiving him when Lisette rushed in full of alarm calling to Monsieur Raoul to escape, as your husband had just returned."

"Lisette was right, you can be nothing less than the devil," said the Countess with a sinister laugh, "and I think we shall be able to do business together. . . . Finish your account."

"Then you and your maid together pushed Monsieur Raoul, who resisted, into the dressing-room; Lisette forced him

along the corridors and through two or three rooms; they then went down a winding staircase, in the wing of the Castle opposite the one by which they had gone up. On arriving at the foot of the staircase, the fugitives found the door locked; then they ran into a kind of office where Lisette opened the window, which was about seven or eight feet above the ground. Monsieur Raoul leaped down out of this window, ran to the stable, found his horse still there, but hamstrung; then he swore that if he met the Count at any time he would hamstring him as the Count had hamstrung his horse, for he thought it a cowardly act to injure a poor beast so unnecessarily. Then he went on foot to the breach, climbed it, and found the Count awaiting him outside the park, with his sword drawn. The Baron had his hunting-knife with him; he drew it, and the duel began."

"Was the Count alone?"

"Wait . . . the Count appeared to be alone; after the fourth or fifth pass the Count was wounded in the shoulder, and sank on one knee, crying: 'Help, Lestocq!' Then the Baron remembered his oath, and hamstrung the Count as he had hamstrung the horse; but as the Baron rose, Lestocq drove his knife into his back; it passed under the shoulder-blade and out through the chest. I need not tell you where . . . you kissed the wound yourself."

"And after that?"

"The Count and his huntsman returned to the Castle, leaving the Baron lying helpless; when the latter came to, he made signs to some passing peasants, who put him on a litter, and bore him away, with the intention of taking him to Villers-Cotterets; but he was in such pain that they could not carry him farther than Puiseux; there they laid him on the bed where you found him, and on which he breathed his last a second after the half-hour after nine in the evening."

The Countess rose, and without speaking, went to her jewel-case and took out the pearls she had worn two nights before. She handed them to Thibault.

"What are they for?" he asked.

"Take them," said the Countess; "they are worth fifty thousand livres."

"Are you still anxious for revenge?"

"Yes," replied the Countess.

"Revenge will cost more than that."

"How much will it cost?"

"Wait for me tomorrow night," said Thibault, "and I will tell you."

"Where shall I await you?" asked the Countess."

"Here," said Thibault, with the leer of a wild animal.

"I will await you here," said the Countess.

"Till tomorrow then."

"Till tomorrow."

Thibault went out. The Countess went and replaced the pearls in her dressing-case; lifted up a false bottom, and drew from underneath it a small bottle containing an opal-colored liquid, and a little dagger with a jeweled handle and case, and a blade inlaid with gold. She hid both beneath her pillow, knelt at her prie-dieu, and, her prayer finished, threw herself dressed on to her bed.

CHAPTER 20

True to Tryst

ON QUITTING the Countess's room, Thibault had left the castle by the way which he had described to her, and soon found himself safe beyond its walls and outside the park. And now, for the first time in his life, Thibault had really nowhere to go. His hut was burnt, he was without a friend, and like Cain, he was a wanderer on the face of the earth. He turned to the unfailing shelter of the

forest, and there made his way to the lower end of Chavigny; as the day was breaking he came across a solitary house, and asked if he could buy some bread. The woman belonging to it, her husband being away, gave him some, but refused to receive payment for it; his appearance frightened her.

Having now food sufficient for the day, Thibault returned to the forest, with the intention of spending his time till evening in a part which he knew between Fleury and Longpont, where the trees were especially thick and tall. As he was looking for a resting-place behind a rock, his eye was attracted by a shining object lying at the bottom of a slope, and his curiosity led him to climb down and see what it was. The shining object was the silver badge belonging to a huntsman's shoulder-belt; the shoulder-belt was slung round the neck of a dead body, or rather of a skeleton, for the flesh had been entirely eaten off the bones, which were as clean as if prepared for an anatomist's study or a painter's studio. The skeleton looked as if it had only lain there since the preceding night.

"Ah! ah!" said Thibault, "this is probably the work of my friends, the wolves; they evidently profited by the permission which I gave them."

Curious to know if possible who the victim was, he examined it more closely; his curiosity was soon satisfied, for the badge, which the wolves had no doubt rejected as less easily digestible than the rest, was lying on the chest of the skeleton, like a ticket on a bale of goods.

J. B. Lestocq
Head Keeper of the Comte de Mont-Gobert.

"Well done!" laughed Thibault, "here is one at least who did not live long to enjoy the result of his murderous act."

Then, contracting his brow, he muttered to himself, in a low voice, and this time without laughing:

"Is there perhaps, after all, what people call a Providence?"

Lestocq's death was not difficult to account for. He had probably been executing some order for his master that night, and on the road between Mont-Gobert and Longpont had been attacked by wolves. He had defended himself with the same knife with which he had wounded the Baron, for Thibault found the knife a few paces off, at a spot where the ground showed traces of a severe struggle; at last the ferocious beasts had dragged him into the hollow, and there devoured him.

Thibault was becoming so indifferent to everything that he felt neither pleasure nor regret, neither satisfaction nor remorse, at Lestocq's death; all he thought was that it simplified matters for the Countess, as she would now have only her husband upon whom she need avenge herself. Then he went and found a place where the rocks afforded him the best shelter from the wind, and prepared to spend his day there in peace. Toward midday he heard the horn of the Lord of Vez, and the cry of his hounds; the mighty huntsman was after game, but the chase did not pass near enough to Thibault to disturb him.

At last the night came. At nine o'clock Thibault rose and set out for the castle of Mont-Gobert. He found the breach, followed the path he knew, and came to the little hut where Lisette had been awaiting him on the night when he had come in the guise of Raoul. The poor girl was there this evening, but alarmed and trembling. Thibault wished to carry out the old traditions and tried to kiss her, but she sprang back with visible signs of fear.

"Do not touch me," she said, "or I shall call out."

"Oh, indeed! my pretty one," said Thibault, "you were not so sour-tempered the other day with the Baron Raoul."

"Maybe not," said the girl, "but a great many things have happened since the other day."

"And many more to happen still," said Thibault in a lively tone.

"I think," said the waiting-maid in a mournful voice, "that the climax is already reached."

Then, as she went on in front, "If you wish to come," she added, "follow me."

Thibault followed her; Lisette, without the slightest effort at concealment, walked straight across the open space that lay between the trees and the castle.

"You are courageous today," said Thibault. "And supposing some one were to see us. . . ."

"There is no fear now," she answered; "the eyes that could have seen us are all closed."

Although he did not understand what the young girl meant by these words, the tone in which they were spoken made Thibault shiver.

He continued to follow her in silence as they went up the winding stairs to the first floor. As Lisette laid her hand on the key of the door, Thibault suddenly stopped her. Something in the silence and solitude of the castle filled him with fear; it seemed as if a curse might have fallen on the place.

"Where are we going?" said Thibault, scarcely knowing himself what he said.

"You know well enough, surely."

"Into the Countess's room?"

"Into the Countess's room."

"She is waiting for me?"

"She is waiting for you."

And Lisette opened the door. "Go in," she said.

Thibault went in, and Lisette shut the door behind him and waited outside.

It was the same exquisite room, lighted in the same manner, filled with the same sweet scent. Thibault looked round for the Countess. He expected to see her appear at the dressing-room door, but the door remained closed. Not a sound was to be heard in the room, except the ticking of the Sèvres clock, and the beating of Thibault's heart. He began to look about him with a feeling of shuddering fear for which he could not account; then his eyes fell on the bed; the Countess was lying asleep upon it. In her hair were the same diamond pins, round her neck the same pearls; she was dressed in the same pink silk dressing-gown, and had on the same little slippers of cloth of silver which she had worn to receive the Baron Raoul.

Thibault went up to her; the Countess did not stir.

"You are sleeping, fair Countess?" he said, leaning over to look at her.

But all at once he started upright, staring before him, his hair standing on end, the sweat breaking out on his forehead. The terrible truth was beginning to dawn upon him; was the Countess sleeping the sleep of this world or of eternity?

He fetched a light from the mantelpiece, and with trembling hand held it to the face of the mysterious sleeper. It was pale as ivory, with the delicate veins traced over the temples, and the lips still red. A drop of pink burning wax fell on this still face of sleep; it did not awake the Countess.

"Ah!" cried Thibault, "what is this?" and he put down the candle, which his shaking hand could no longer hold, on the night-table.

The Countess lay with her arms stretched out close to her sides; she appeared to be clasping something in either hand. With some effort, Thibault was able to open the left one; within it he

found the little bottle which she had taken from her dressing-case the night before. He opened the other hand; within it lay a piece of paper on which were written these few words: "True to tryst," —yes, true and faithful unto death, for the Countess was dead!

All Thibault's illusions were fading one after the other, like the dreams of the night which gradually fade away as the sleeper becomes more and more thoroughly awake. There was a difference, however, for other men find their dead alive again in their dreams; but with Thibault, his dead did not arise and walk, but remained lying for ever in their last sleep.

He wiped his forehead, went to the door leading into the corridor, and opened it, to find Lisette on her knees, praying.

"Is the Countess dead, then?" asked Thibault.

"The Countess is dead, and the Count is dead."

"From the effect of the wounds given him by the Baron Raoul?"

"No, from the blow with the dagger given him by the Countess."

"Ah!" said Thibault, grimacing hideously in his effort to force a laugh in the midst of this grim drama, "all this tale you hint at is new to me."

Then Lisette told him the tale in full. It was a plain tale, but a terrible one.

The Countess had remained in bed part of the day, listening to the village bells of Puiseux, which were tolling as the Baron's body was borne from thence to Vauparfond, where he was to be laid in the family grave. Toward four o'clock the bells ceased; then the Countess rose, took the dagger from under her pillow, hid it in her breast, and went toward her husband's room. She found the valet in attendance in good spirits; the doctor had just left, having examined the wound, and declared the Count's life out of danger.

"Madame will agree that it is a thing to rejoice at!" said the valet.

"Yes, to rejoice at indeed."

And the Countess went on into her husband's room. Five minutes later she left it again.

"The Count is sleeping," she said. "Do not go in until he calls."

The valet bowed and sat down in the anteroom to be in readiness at the first call from his master. The Countess went back to her room.

"Undress me, Lisette," she said to her waiting-maid, "and give me the clothes that I had on the last time *he* came."

The maid obeyed; we have already seen how every detail of toilet was arranged exactly as it had been on that fatal night. Then the Countess wrote a few words on a piece of paper, which she folded and kept in her right hand. After that, she lay down on her bed.

"Will Madame not take anything?" asked the maid.

The Countess opened her left hand, and showed her a little bottle she was holding inside it.

"Yes, Lisette," she said, "I am going to take what is in this bottle."

"What, nothing but that?" said Lisette.

"It will be enough, Lisette; for after I have taken it, I shall have need of nothing more."

And as she spoke, she put the bottle to her mouth and drank the contents at a draft. Then she said:

"You saw that man, Lisette, who waited for us in the road; I have a meeting with him this evening, here in my room, at half past nine. You know where to go and wait for him, and you will bring him here. I do not wish that any one should be able to say that I was not true to my word, even after I am dead."

Thibault had nothing to say; the agreement made between them had been kept. Only the Countess had accomplished her

revenge herself, single-handed, as every one understood, when the valet feeling uneasy about his master, and going softly into his room to look at him, found him lying on his back with a dagger in his heart; and then hurrying to tell Madame what had happened, found the Countess dead also.

The news of this double death soon spread through the castle, and all the servants had fled, saying that the exterminating angel was in the castle; the waiting-maid alone remained to carry out her dead mistress's wishes.

THIBAULT had nothing more to do at the castle, so he left the Countess on her bed, with Lisette near her, and went downstairs. As Lisette had said, there was no fear now of meeting either master or servants; the servants had run away, the master and mistress were dead. Thibault once more made for the breach in the wall. The sky was dark, and if it had not been January, you might have imagined a thunderstorm was brewing; there was barely light enough to see the footpath, as he went along. Once or twice Thibault paused; he fancied he had detected the sound of the dry branches cracking under some one's footsteps keeping pace with his, both to right and left.

Having come to the breach, Thibault distinctly heard a voice say: "That's the man!" and at the same moment two gendarmes, concealed on the farther side of the wall, seized Thibault by the collar, while two others came up behind.

It appeared that Cramoisi, jealous with regard to Lisette, had been prowling about at nights on the watch, and had, only the evening before, noticed a strange man come in and go out of the park along the more secluded paths, and he had reported the fact to the head of the police. When the recent serious events that had taken place at the castle became generally known, orders were given to send four men and take up any suspicious-looking person seen prowling about. Two of the men, with Cramoisi for guide, had ambushed on the farther side of the breach, and the two others had dogged Thibault through the park. Then, as we have seen, at the signal given by Cramoisi they had all four fallen upon him as he issued from the breach.

There was a long and obstinate struggle; Thibault was not a man that even four others could overcome without difficulty; but he had no weapon by him, and his resistance was therefore useless. The gendarmes had been more bent on securing him, on account of having recognized that it was Thibault, and Thibault was beginning to earn a very bad name, so many misfortunes having become associated with it; so Thibault was knocked down, and finally bound and led off between two mounted men. The other two gendarmes walked one in front, and one behind. Thibault had merely struggled out of a natural feeling of self-defense and pride, for his power to inflict evil was, as we know, unlimited, and he had but to wish his assailants dead, and they would have fallen lifeless at his feet. But he thought there was time enough for that; as long as there still remained a wish to him, he could escape from man's justice, even though he were at the foot of the scaffold.

So Thibault, securely bound, his hands tied, and fetters upon his feet, walked along between his four gendarmes, apparently in a state of resignation. One of the gendarmes held the end of the rope with which he was bound, and the four men made jokes and laughed at him, asking the wizard Thibault why, being possessed of such power, he had allowed himself to be taken. And Thibault replied to their scoffings with the well-known proverb: "He laughs best who laughs last," and

the gendarmes expressed a wish that they might be the ones to do so.

On leaving Puiseux behind, they came to the forest. The weather was growing more and more threatening; the dark clouds hung so low that the trees looked as if they were holding up a huge black veil, and it was impossible to see four steps ahead. But Thibault saw lights swiftly passing, and crossing one another, in the darkness on either side. Closer and closer drew the lights, and pattering footfalls were heard among the dry leaves. The horses became restive, shied and snorted, sniffing the air and trembling beneath their riders, while the coarse laughter of the men themselves died down. It was Thibault's turn to laugh now.

"What are you laughing at?" asked one of the gendarmes.

"I am laughing at your having left off laughing," said Thibault.

The lights drew nearer, and the footfalls became more distinct, at the sound of Thibault's voice. Then a more ominous sound was heard, a sound of teeth striking together, as jaws opened and shut.

"Yes, yes, my friends," said Thibault, "you have tasted human flesh, and you found it good."

He was answered by a low growl of approbation, half like a dog's, and half like a hyena's.

"Quite so," said Thibault, "I understand; after having made a meal of a keeper, you would not mind tasting a gendarme."

The gendarmes themselves were beginning to shudder with fear. "To whom are you talking?" they asked him.

"To those who can answer me," said Thibault; and he gave a howl. Twenty or more howls responded, some from close at hand, some from farther off.

"H'm!" said one of the gendarmes, "what are these beasts that are following us? This good-for-nothing seems to understand their language."

"What!" said the shoemaker, "you take Thibault the wolf-master prisoner, you carry him through the forest at night, and then you ask what are the lights and the howls that follow him! . . . Do you hear, friends?" cried Thibault. "These gentlemen are asking who you are. Answer them, all of you together, that they may have no further doubt on the matter."

The wolves, obedient to their master's voice, gave one prolonged, unanimous howl. The horses panted and shivered, and one or two of them reared. The gendarmes endeavored to calm their animals, patting and gentling them.

"That is nothing," said Thibault; "wait till you see each horse with two wolves hanging on to its hind-quarters and another at its throat."

The wolves now came in between the horses' legs, and began caressing Thibault; one of them stood up and put its front paws on Thibault's chest, as if asking for orders.

"Presently, presently," said Thibault, "there is plenty of time; do not be selfish, give your comrades time to come up."

The men could no longer control their horses, which were rearing and shying, and although going at a foot's pace, were streaming with sweat.

"Do you not think," said Thibault, "you would do best now to come to terms with me? That is, if you were to let me free on condition that you all sleep in your beds tonight."

"Go at a walking pace," said one of the gendarmes; "as long as we do that, we have nothing to fear."

Another one drew his sword. A second or two later there was a howl of pain; one of the wolves had seized hold of this gendarme's boot, and the latter had pierced him through with his weapon.

"I call that a very impudent thing to do," said Thibault; "the wolves eat each other, whatever the proverb may say, and once having tasted blood, I do not know that even I shall have the power to hold them back."

The wolves threw themselves in a body on their wounded comrade, and in five minutes there was nothing left of its carcass but the bare bones. The gendarmes had profited by this respite to get on ahead, but without releasing Thibault, whom they obliged to run alongside of them; what he had foreseen, however, happened. There was a sudden sound as of an approaching hurricane—the whole pack was in pursuit, following them up at full gallop. The horses, having once started trotting, refused to go at a walking pace again, and frightened by the stamping, the smell, and the howls, now set off galloping, in spite of their riders' efforts to hold them in. The man who had hold of the rope, now requiring both hands to master his horse, let go of Thibault; and the wolves leaped on to the horses, clinging desperately to the cruppers and withers and throats of the terrified animals. No sooner had the latter felt the sharp teeth of their assailants, than they scattered, rushing in every direction.

"Hurrah, wolves! hurrah!" cried Thibault. But the fierce animals had no need of encouragement, and soon each horse had six or seven more wolves in pursuit of him.

Horses and wolves disappeared, some one way, some the other, and the men's cries of distress, the agonized neighings of the horses, and the furious howls of the wolves become gradually fainter and fainter as they traveled farther away.

Thibault was left free once more, and alone. His hands, however, were still bound, and his feet fettered. First he tried to undo the cord with his teeth, but this he found impossible. Then he tried to wrench his bonds apart by the power of his muscles, but that too was unavailing; the only result of his efforts was to make the cord cut into his flesh. It was his turn to bellow with pain and anger. At last, tired of trying to wrest his hands free, he lifted them, bound as they were, to heaven, and cried:

"Oh! black wolf! friend, let these cords that bind me be loosened; thou knowest well that it is only to do evil that I wish for my hands to be free."

And at the same moment his fetters were broken and fell to the ground, and Thibault beat his hands together with another roar, this time of joy.

CHAPTER 21

The Genius of Evil

THE next evening, about nine o'clock, a man might be seen walking along the Puits-Sarrasin road and making for the Osières forest-path.

It was Thibault, on his way to pay a last visit to the hut, and to see if any remains of it had been left by the fire. A heap of smoking cinders alone marked the place where it had stood; and as Thibault came in sight of it, he saw the wolves, as if he had appointed them to meet him there, forming an immense circle round the ruins, and looking upon them with an expression of mournful anger. They seemed to understand that by destroying this poor hut, made of earth and branches, the one who, by the compact with the black wolf, had been given them for master, had been made a victim.

As Thibault entered the circle, all the wolves gave simultaneously a long and sinister-sounding howl, as if to make him understand that they were ready to help in avenging him.

Thibault went and sat down on the spot where the hearth had stood; it was recognizable from a few blackened stones still

remaining, which were otherwise uninjured, and by a higher heap of cinders just at that spot. He stayed there some minutes, absorbed in his unhappy thoughts. But he was not reflecting that the ruin which he saw around him was the consequence and the punishment of his jealous and covetous desires, which had gone on gathering strength. He felt neither repentance nor regret. That which dominated all other feeling in him was his satisfaction at the thought of being henceforth able to render to his fellow-creatures evil for evil, his pride in having, thanks to his terrible auxiliaries, the power to fight against those who persecuted him.

And as the wolves continued their melancholy howling: "Yes, my friends," said Thibault, "yes, your howls answer to the cry of my heart. . . . My fellow-creatures have destroyed my hut, they have cast to the winds the ashes of the tools wherewith I earned my daily bread; their hatred pursues me as it pursues you. I expect from them neither mercy nor pity. We are their enemies as they are ours; and I will have neither mercy nor compassion on them. Come then, let us go from this hut to the castle, and carry thither the desolation which they have brought home to me."

And then the master of the wolves, like a chief of banditti followed by his desperadoes, set off with his pack in quest of pillage and carnage.

This time it was neither red deer, nor fallow deer, nor any timid game of which they were in pursuit. Sheltered by the darkness of the night Thibault first directed his course to the Château of Vez, for there was lodged his chief enemy. The Baron had three farms belonging to the estate, stables filled with horses, and others filled with cows, and the park was full of sheep. All these places were attacked the first night, and on the morrow two horses, four cows, and ten sheep were found killed.

The Baron was doubtful at first if this could be the work of the beasts against which he waged so fierce a warfare; there seemed something partaking rather of intelligence and revenge in it than of the mere unreasoning attacks of a pack of wild animals. Still it seemed manifest that the wolves must have been the aggressors, judging by the marks of teeth on the carcasses and the footprints left on the ground.

Next night the Baron set watchers to lie in wait, but Thibault and his wolves were at work on the farther side of the forest. This time it was the stables and parks of Soucy and of Viviers which were decimated, and the following night those of Boursonnes and Yvors. The work of annihilation, once begun, must be carried out with desperate determination, and the master never left his wolves now; he slept with them in their dens, and lived in the midst of them, stimulating their thirst for blood.

Many a woodman, many a heath-gatherer, came face to face in the thickets with the menacing white teeth of a wolf, and was either carried off and eaten, or just saved his life by the aid of his courage and his billhook. Guided by a human intelligence, the wolves had become organized and disciplined, and were far more formidable than a band of discontented soldiery let loose in a conquered country.

The terror of them became general; no one dared go beyond the towns and villages unarmed; horses and cattle were all fed inside the stables, and the men themselves, their work done, waited for one another, so as not to go about singly. The Bishop of Soissons ordered public prayer to be made, asking God to send a thaw, for the unusual ferocity of the wolves was attributed to the great quantity of snow that had fallen. But the re-

port also went about that the wolves were incited to their work, and led about by a man; that this man was more indefatigable, more cruel and insatiable than the wolves themselves; that in imitation of his companions he ate raw flesh and quenched his thirst in blood. And the people went further and said that this man was Thibault.

The Bishop pronounced sentence of excommunication against the former shoemaker. The Lord of Vez, however, had little faith in the thunders of the Church being of much effect, unless supported by some well-conducted hunting. He was somewhat cast down at so much blood being spilt, and his pride was sorely hurt that his, the Grand Master's, own cattle should have suffered so heavily from the very wolves he was especially appointed to destroy.

At the same time, he could not but feel a secret delight at the thought of the triumphant view-halloos in store for him, and of the fame which he could not fail to win among all sportsmen of repute. His passion for the chase, excited by the way in which his adversaries the wolves had so openly entered upon the struggle, became absolutely overpowering; he allowed neither respite nor repose; he took no sleep himself and ate his meals in the saddle. All night long he scoured the country in company with l'Eveillé and Engoulevent, who in consideration of his marriage had been raised to the rank of pricker; and the dawn had no sooner appeared before he was again in the saddle, ready to start and chase the wolf until it was too dark to distinguish the hounds. But alas! all his knowledge of the art of venery, all his courage, all his perseverance, were lost labor. He occasionally brought down some wretched cub, some miserable beast eaten with mange, some imprudent glutton which had so gorged itself with carnage that its breath would not hold out after an hour or two's run; but the larger, well-grown wolves, with their thick dark coats, their muscles like steel springs and their long slender feet—not one of these lost a hair in the war that was being made upon them. Thanks to Thibault they met their enemies in arms on nearly equal ground.

As the Baron of Vez remained for ever with his dogs, so did Thibault with his wolves; after a night of sack and pillage, he kept the pack awake on the watch to help the one that the Baron had started. This wolf again, following Thibault's instructions, had recourse at first to stratagem. It doubled, crossed its tracks, waded in the streams, leaped up into the bending trees so as to make it more difficult still for huntsmen and hounds to follow the scent, and finally when it felt its powers failing, it adopted bolder measures and went straight ahead. Then the other wolves and their master intervened; at the least sign of hesitation on the part of the hounds, they managed so cleverly to put them on the wrong scent, that it required an experienced eye to detect that the dogs were not all following up the same track, and nothing less than the Baron's profound knowledge could decide which was the right one. Even he sometimes was mistaken.

Again, the wolves in their turn followed the huntsmen; it was a pack hunting a pack; only the one hunted in silence, which made it far the more formidable of the two. Did a tired hound fall behind, or another get separated from the main body, it was seized and killed in an instant, and Engoulevent, whom we have had occasion to mention several times before and who had taken poor Marcotte's place, having hastened one day to the help of one of his hounds that was uttering cries of distress, was himself attacked and

only owed his life to the swiftness of his horse.

It was not long before the Baron's pack was decimated; his best hounds were nearly dead with fatigue, and his more second-rate ones had perished by the wolves' teeth. The stable was in no better condition than the kennel; Bayard was foundered, Tancred had sprained a tendon leaping over a ditch, and a strained fetlock had placed Valorous on the list of invalids. Sultan, luckier than his three companions, had fallen honorably on the field of battle, having succumbed to a sixteen hours' run under the weight of his gigantic master, who never for a moment lost courage notwithstanding the fact that the dead bodies of his finest and most faithful servitors lay heaped around him.

The Baron, following the example of the noble-hearted Romans who exhausted the resources of military art against the Carthaginians who were for ever re-appearing as enemies, the Baron, I repeat, changed his tactics, called on all available men among the peasants, and beat up the game throughout the forest with such a formidable number of men that not so much as a hare was left in its form near any spot which they had passed.

But Thibault made it his business to find out beforehand where these *battues* were going to take place, and if he ascertained that the beaters were on the side of the forest toward Viviers or Soucy, he and his wolves made an excursion to Boursonnes or Yvors; and if the Baron and his men were busy near Haramont or Longpré, the people of Corcy and Vertefeuille were made painfully aware of Thibault and his wolves.

In vain the Lord of Vez drew his cordon at night round the suspected enclosures, so as to begin the attack with daylight; never once did his men succeed in starting a wolf, for not once did Thibault make a mistake in his calculations. If by chance he had not been well informed, and was uncertain in what direction the Baron and his men were going, he called all his wolves together, sending express couriers after them as the night set in; he then led them unobserved down the wooded lane leading to Lisart l'Abbesse, which at that time ran between the forest of Compiègne and the forest of Villers-Cotterets, and so was able to pass from one to the other.

This state of things went on for several months. Both the Baron and Thibault carried out the task each had set before himself, with equally passionate energy; the latter, like his adversary, seemed to have required some supernatural power whereby he was able to resist fatigue and excitement; and this was the more remarkable seeing that during the short intervals of respite accorded by the Lord of Vez, the wolf-leader was by no means at peace in himself.

It was not that the terrible deeds in which he was an active agent, and at which he presided, filled him exactly with horror, for he thought them justifiable; he threw the responsibility of them, he said, on to those who had forced him to commit them; but there were moments of failing spirit, for which he could not account, when he went about in the midst of his ferocious companions, feeling gloomy, morose and heavy-hearted. Again the image of Agnelette would rise before him, seeming to him like the personification of his own past life, honest and laborious, peaceful and innocent. And more than that, he felt he loved her more than he had ever thought it possible for him to love anybody. At times he would weep at the thought of all his lost happiness; at others he was seized with a wild fit of jealousy against the one to whom she now

belonged,—she, who at one time might, if he had liked, have been his.

One day, the Baron in order to prepare some fresh means of destruction, had been forced for the while to leave the wolves in peace. Thibault, who was in one of the moods we have just described, wandered forth from the den where he lived in company with the wolves. It was a splendid summer's night, and he began to rove about the woodlands, where the moon was lighting up the trunks of the trees, dreaming of the time when he trod the mossy carpet underfoot free from trouble and anxiety, until at last the only happiness which was now left him, forgetfulness of the present, stole over his senses. Lost in this sweet dream of his earlier life, he was all of a sudden aroused by a cry of distress from somewhere near at hand. He was now so accustomed to such sounds, that, ordinarily, he would have paid no attention to it, but his heart was for the moment softened by the recollection of Agnelette, and he felt more disposed than usual to pity; as it happened also he was near the place where he had first seen the gentle child, and this helped to awaken his kindlier nature.

He ran to the spot whence the cry had come, and as he leaped from the underwood into the deep forest-lane near Ham, he saw a woman struggling with an immense wolf which had thrown her on the ground. Thibault could not have said why he was so agitated at this sight, nor why his heart beat more violently than usual; he rushed forward and seizing the animal by the throat hurled it away from its victim, and then lifting the woman in his arms, he carried her to the side of the lane and laid her on the slope. Here a ray of moonlight, breaking through the clouds, fell on the face of the woman he had saved, and Thibault saw that it was Agnelette. Near the spot was the spring in which Thibault had once gazed at himself, and had seen the first red hair; he ran to it, took up water in his hands, and threw it into the woman's face. Agnelette opened her eyes, gave a cry of terror, and tried to rise and flee.

"What!" cried the wolf-leader, as if he were still Thibault the shoemaker, "you do not know me again, Agnelette?"

"Ah! yes indeed, I know you, Thibault; and it is because I know who you are," cried the young woman, "that I am afraid!"

Then throwing herself on her knees, and clasping her hands: "Oh do not kill me, Thibault!" she cried. "Do not kill me! It would be such dreadful trouble for the poor old grandmother! Thibault, do not kill me!"

The wolf-leader stood overcome with consternation; up to this hour he had not fully realized the hideous renown which he had gained; but the terror which the sight of him inspired in the woman who had loved him and whom he still loved, filled him with a horror of himself.

"I, kill you, Agnelette?" he said, "just when I have snatched you from death? Oh! how you must hate and despise me for such a thought to enter your head."

"I do not hate you, Thibault," said the young woman, "but I hear such things about you that I feel afraid of you."

"And do they say nothing of the infidelity which has led Thibault to commit such crimes?"

"I do not understand you," said Agnelette looking at Thibault with her large eyes, blue as the heavens.

"What!" exclaimed Thibault, "you do not understand that I loved you—that I adored you, Agnelette, and that the loss of you sent me out of my mind?"

"If you loved me, if you adored me, Thibault, what prevented you from marrying me?"

"The spirit of evil," muttered Thibault,

"I too loved you," continued the young woman, "and I suffered cruelly waiting for you."

Thibault heaved a sigh.

"You loved me, Agnelette?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the young woman with her soft voice and gentle eyes.

"But now, all is over," said Thibault, "and you love me no more."

"Thibault," answered Agnelette, "I no longer love you, because it is no longer right to love you; but one can not always forget one's first love as one would wish."

"Agnelette!" cried Thibault, trembling all over, "be careful what you say!"

"Why should I be careful what I say, since it is the truth?" said the girl with an innocent shake of the head. "The day you told me that you wished to make me your wife, I believed you, Thibault; for why should I think that you would lie to me when I had just done you a service? Then later I met you, but I did not go in search of you; you came to me, you spoke words of love to me, you were the first to refer to the promise that you had made me. And it was not my fault either, Thibault, that I was afraid of that ring which you wore, which was large enough for you and yet—oh, it was horrible!—not big enough for one of my fingers."

"Would you like me not to wear this ring any more?" said Thibault. "Would you like me to throw it away?" And he began trying to pull it off his finger, but as it had been too small to go on Agnelette's finger, so now it was too small to be taken off Thibault's. In vain he struggled with it, and tried to move it with his teeth; the ring seemed riveted to his finger for all eternity.

Thibault saw that it was no use trying to get rid of it; it was a token of compact between himself and the black wolf, and with a sigh he let his arms fall hopelessly to his sides.

"That day," went on Agnelette, "I ran away; I know that I was wrong to do so, but I was no longer mistress of myself after seeing that ring and more still. . . ." She lifted her eyes as she spoke, looking timidly up at Thibault's hair. Thibault was bareheaded, and, by the light of the moon Agnelette could see that it was no longer a single hair that shone red as the flames of hell, but that half the hair on Thibault's head was now of this devil's color.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, drawing back, "Thibault! Thibault! What has happened to you since I last saw you?"

"Agnelette!" cried Thibault, throwing himself down with his face to the ground, and holding his head between his hands, "I could not tell any human creature, not even a priest, what has happened to me since then; but to Agnelette, all I can say is: Agnelette! Agnelette! have pity on me, for I have been most unhappy!"

AGNELETTE went up to him and took his hands in hers.

"You did love me then? You did love me?" he cried.

"What can I do, Thibault?" said the girl with the same sweetness and innocence as before. "I took you at your word, and every time I heard some one knocking at our hut door, I thought it was you come to say to the old grandmother, 'Mother, I love Agnelette, Agnelette loves me; will you give her to me for my wife?'

"Then when I went and opened the door, and found that it was not you, I used to go into a corner and cry."

"And now, Agnelette, now?"

"Now," she answered, "now, Thibault, it may seem strange, but in spite of all the terrible tales that are told about you, I have not been really frightened; I was sure that you could not wish any harm to me, and I was walking boldly through the forest, when that dreadful beast from

which you saved me, suddenly sprang upon me."

"But how is it that you are near your old home? Do you not live with your husband?"

"We lived together for a while at Vez, but there was no room there for the grandmother; and so I said to my husband, 'The grandmother must be thought of first; I must go back to her; when you wish to see me you will come.' "

"And he consented to that arrangement?"

"Not at first, but I pointed out to him that the grandmother is seventy years of age; that if she were only to live another two or three years—God grant it may be more!—it would only be two or three years of some extra trouble for us, whereas in all probability we had long years of life before us. Then he understood that it was right to give to those that had least."

But all the while that Agnelette was giving this explanation, Thibault could think of nothing but that the love she once had for him was not yet dead.

"So," said Thibault, "you loved me? And so, Agnelette, you could love me again?"

"That is impossible now, because I belong to another."

"Agnelette, Agnelette! only say that you love me!"

"No, Thibault, if I loved you, I should do everything in the world to hide it from you."

"And why?" cried Thibault. "Why? You do not know my power. I know that I have only a wish or two left, but with your help, by combining these wishes together, I could make you as rich as a queen. . . . We could leave the country, leave France, Europe; there are large countries, of which you do not even know the names, Agnelette, called America and India. They are paradises, with blue skies, tall trees and birds of every kind. Agnelette, say that you will come with me; nobody will know that we have gone off together, nobody will know where we are, nobody will know that we love one another, nobody will know even that we are alive."

"Fly with you, Thibault?" said Agnelette, looking at the wolf-leader as if she had but half understood what he said. "Do you forget that I no longer belong to myself? Do you not know that I am married?"

"What does that matter," said Thibault, "if it is I whom you love, and if we can live happily together?"

"Oh! Thibault! Thibault! what are you saying?"

"Listen," went on Thibault, "I am going to speak to you in the name of this world and the next. Do you wish to save me, Agnelette, body and soul? If so, do not resist my pleading; have pity on me, come with me; let us go somewhere together, where we shall no longer hear these howlings, or breathe this atmosphere of reeking flesh; and, if it scares you to think of being a rich, grand lady, somewhere then where I can again be Thibault the workman, Thibault, poor but beloved, and, therefore, Thibault happy in his hard work, some place where Agnelette will have no other husband but me."

"Ah! Thibault! I was ready to become your wife, and you scorned me!"

"Do not remember my sins, Agnelette, which have been so cruelly punished."

"Thibault, another has done what you were not willing to do. He took the poor young girl; he burdened himself with the poor old blind woman; he gave a name to the one and bread to the other; he had no ambition beyond that of gaining my love; he desired no dowry beyond my marriage vow; can you think of asking me to return evil for good? Do you dare to suggest that I should leave the one who

(Please turn to page 284)

Coming Next Month

"LIVING corpses! Men and women, filched from the grave, festering in their moldering cerements, talking, laughing, dancing, breathing, holding hellish jubilee! All this have I seen—and more. Yet who will believe me—I who am an inmate of the House of the Living Dead? Even as I pen this screed I look down and see the rotting cloth dropping from my mildewed framework with every move, and feel the maggots bore their tortuous way through my decaying carcass. Ugh! Even I, living dead man that I am, inured to the horror of it all, shudder as I write.

"I am helpless. Would that I had the power to free myself from the foul grasp of Lessman, the master of us all. Across the room lies the body of Carter Cope. Soon, but not until Lessman commands, I will return to occupy it. My body belongs to him—to Doctor Lessman. But my soul is my own, even though Lessman holds it in his clutches. For the soul does not die. Ah, a wonderful man is Darius Lessman—able as he is to throw off his temporal body and assume that of another. He is superman—or devil. I——"

Shuddery thrills are in store for you in this goose-flesh story, which will be a feature of our next issue. Read:

THE HOUSE OF THE LIVING DEAD

By

HAROLD WARD

—ALSO—

THE PLANET OF THE DEAD
by Clark Ashton Smith

A unique story of star-gazing; a bizarre tale of life in two planets and the splendors of a far world.

THE VENGEANCE OF IXMAL
by Kirk Mashburn

An eery story of a vampire-haunted village, and quivering human sacrifices on an Aztec altar.

ISLAND OF DOOM
by Bassett Morgan

A thrill-tale of brain transplantation, and a surgical horror that was consummated on a little island in the South Pacific.

THE ANSWER OF THE DEAD
by J. Paul Suter

The protecting arms of the dead man reached back from the grave to shield the woman he loved.

THE MAN WHO PLAYED WITH TIME
by A. W. Bernal

A strange weird-scientific tale of the fourth dimension and a tragic journey into the past.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the next issue. Also, another thrilling installment of Seabury Quinn's masterpiece of weird literature, *The Devil's Bride*, and the smashing conclusion of Alexandre Dumas' fascinating serial, *The Wolf-Leader*.

March WEIRD TALES Out February 1

(Continued from page 282)

has given me such proof of his love for the one who has given me proof only of his indifference?"

"But what matter still, Agnelette, since you do not love him and since you do love me?"

"Thibault, do not turn and twist my words to make them appear to say what they do not. I said that I still preserved my friendship for you; I never said that I did not love my husband. I should like to see you happy, my friend; above all I should like to see you abjure your evil ways and repent of your sins; and last of all, I wish that God may have mercy upon you, and that you may be delivered from that spirit of evil, of which you spoke just now. For this I pray night and morning on my knees; but even that I may be able to pray for you, I must keep myself pure; if the voice that supplicates for mercy is to rise to God's throne, it must be an innocent one; above all, I must scrupulously keep the oath which I swore at His altar."

On hearing these decisive words from Agnelette, Thibault again became fierce and morose.

"Do you not know, Agnelette, that it is very imprudent of you to speak to me here like that?"

"And why, Thibault?" asked the young woman.

"We are alone here together; it is dark, and not a man of the open would dare to come into the forest at this hour; and know, the King is not more master in his kingdom than I am here."

"I do not understand you, Thibault."

"I mean that having prayed, implored, and conjured, I can now threaten."

"You, threaten?"

"What I mean is," continued Thibault, paying no heed to Agnelette's words, "that every word you speak does not excite my love for you more than it rouses my hatred toward him; in short, I mean that it is imprudent of the lamb to irritate the wolf when the lamb is in the power of the wolf."

"I told you, Thibault, before, that I started to walk through the forest without any feeling of fear at meeting you. As I was coming to, I felt a momentary terror, remembering involuntarily what I had heard said about you; but at this moment, Thibault, you will try in vain to make me turn pale."

Thibault flung both hands up to his head.

"Do not talk like that," he said; "you can not think what the devil is whispering to me, and what an effort I have to make to resist his voice."

"You may kill me if you like," replied Agnelette, "but I will not be guilty of the cowardice which you ask of me; you may kill me, but I shall remain faithful to my husband; you may kill me, but I shall pray to God to help him as I die."

"Do not speak his name, Agnelette; do not make me think about that man."

"You can threaten me as much as you like, Thibault, for I am in your hands; but, happily, he is far from you, and you have no power over him."

"And who told you that, Agnelette? Do you not know that, thanks to the diabolical power I possess and which I can hardly fight against, I am able to strike as well far as near?"

"And if I should become a widow, Thibault, do you imagine that I should be vile enough to accept your hand when it was stained with the blood of the one whose name I bear?"

"Agnelette," said Thibault, falling on his knees, "Agnelette, save me from committing a further crime."

"It is you, not I, who will be responsible for the crime. I can give you my life, Thibault, but not my honor."

"Oh," roared Thibault, "love flies from the heart when hatred enters; take care, Agnelette! take heed to your husband! The devil is in me, and he will soon speak through my mouth. Instead of the consolation which I had hoped from your love, and which your love refuses, I will have vengeance. Stay my hand, Agnelette, there is yet time; stay it from cursing, from destroying; if not, understand that it is not I, but you, who strike him dead! Agnelette, you know now. . . . Agnelette, you do not stop me from speaking? Let it be so then, and let the curse fall on all three of us, you and him and me! Agnelette, I wish your husband to die, and he will die!"

Agnelette uttered a terrible cry; then, as if her reason reasserted itself, protesting against this murder at a distance which seemed impossible to her, she exclaimed:

"No, no; you only say that to terrify me, but my prayers will prevail against your maledictions."

"Go then, and learn how Heaven answers your prayers. Only, if you wish to see your husband again alive, Agnelette, you had better make haste, or you will but stumble against his dead body."

Overcome by the tone of conviction with which these last words were pronounced, and yielding to an irresistible feeling of terror, Agnelette, without responding to Thibault, who stood on the farther side of the lane with his hand held out and pointing toward Préciamont, set off running in the direction which it seemed to indicate, and soon disappeared into the night as she turned out of sight at the corner of the road. As she passed from his view, Thibault uttered a howl, which might have been taken for the howling of a whole pack of wolves, and plunging into the thicket, "Ah! now," he cried aloud to himself, "I am indeed a lost and accursed soul!"

(To be concluded next month)

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The Eyrie

(Continued from page 150)

Son of the Tiger, was the best. I'll never forget the experiences of Tam and Nina in the Place of the Gods. I hope that you will publish another Tam story. Edmond Hamilton is getting better with every story he writes. *Creatures of the Comet* was great."

A letter from Maurice Schwartz, of Philadelphia, says: "I have never entered your discussions like other readers. Still, I want to know what happened to A. Merritt, author of *The Woman of the Wood.* Why not reprint Hamilton's masterpiece, *The Monster-God of Mamurth,* and some of E. H. Price's?" [We recently published one of Price's earlier stories as a reprint and we shall probably reprint both *The Woman of the Wood* and *The Monster-God of Mamurth.*—THE EDITORS.]

E. I. Haines, of New York City, writes: "There is not one of your writers who can touch Seabury Quinn, in my estimation, for he is always original with his Jules de Grandin stories, is entertaining in style, and mixes humor with tragedy and horror in a way that shows real literary merit."

Alonzo Leonard, of Portsmouth, Ohio, writes to the Eyrie: "I found a needle in a haystack once—that was easy. But picking out the best stories in the December W. T. is too much. All are best! Each story is, in itself, a masterpiece. For action *The Dark Man* and *Tam, Son of the Tiger* fight it out tooth and toe-nail for supremacy. For grim humor, I'd say *Dead Man's Vengeance*—and how! *Creatures of the Comet* is the first story of interplanetary travel I have liked. For gruesomeness there is little to choose between *Bitter Gold* and *Deserter,* although I must say that after reading about the hooks in *Deserter* my wrists hurt! *The Haunted Chair* promises to be good and *The Wolf-Leader* continues to be good."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the December issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was the first installment of Gaston Leroux's mystery serial, *The Haunted Chair.*

My Favorite Stories in the February Weird Tales Are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why?----------

(2)---------- ----------

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Reader's name and address:

A Brief Weird Story Is

DREAM JUSTICE

By E. W. MAYO

THE strange circumstances surrounding the death of Edward Martin were never fully revealed to the public. It was thought by most people that he died of causes unknown, even to the doctors.

But the following I found in his diary; and although there is no way of proving the truth or untruth of it, I nevertheless am inclined to think it explains his death more satisfactorily than any other reason given:

Feb. 7—Last night I had a dream—a dream that was only too true. I dreamed that a murder I had committed three years ago, which I thought had been successfully covered up, had been brought to light. The evidence against me was so forceful that I confessed. I was then taken to the county jail, where I was charged with murder in the first degree. At this point I awoke and found myself wet with perspiration. Why, although the facts concerning the murder are true, I should have a dream of this sort, I can't explain.

Feb. 8—My dream was continued last night. This time it seemed to cover a period of some weeks. I was convicted and sentenced to die in the electric chair August 20. After my sentence was passed I again awoke to find myself in a cold sweat. I was extremely nervous today and am hoping I won't have another of these foolish dreams. The murder is completely covered up, I'm sure, and I was never suspected, so there is no need to be afraid or worried even if I do dream of it. But still I would like an explanation for it.

Feb. 9—It was awful last night. Time passed quickly and it was only three days before the day set for my electrocution when I awoke. It really seemed as if I had spent those long weeks in my cell, waiting and waiting. Today I was really worried, and my friends wanted to know what was wrong with me.

Feb. 10—Two more days—and then——? I can't get away from it, I dream and dream—it is terrible. I even plotted an escape from prison last night—but failed. The thing preys on my mind all the time now—day and night. I can't eat, I can't do anything—I look and act insane; my friends demand to know what the trouble is—but I don't dare tell them—they couldn't help me. No one can help me—if only I could get away from those cursed, those infernal dreams!

Feb. 11—One more day. Last night

(Continued on next page)

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(Continued from page 287)

was a repetition of the one before. I didn't go out today—I was afraid my friends might hear me talking and muttering to myself. I seem to be out of my head—I feel weak and can hardly think at all. I only dread what tonight will bring.

Feb. 12—Tonight at 12—I'm doomed to go then. But I think I have a way to fool them—I won't go to sleep—I'll stay up and awake until after 12—maybe that will end it all—maybe the spell will be broken then and I shall be saved. I'll drink coffee—black coffee—lots of it—that will keep me awake.

10 p. m.—So far I've been able to keep awake—but I'm getting a little drowsy—I guess I need more black coffee.

11 p. m.—I'm so tired and sleepy I can hardly hold my head up—maybe I need a little fresh air—going to open a window. Just another hour or more and then—if I can only hold out till then!

11:55 p. m.—I can barely write—I almost went under that time—a few more minutes—I can't—I can't—my eyes—I can't hold them open—I'm going—I'm going——

* * * * * * *

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His dead body, slumped down in a big armchair, with peculiar marks on his wrists and ankles—marks that weren't explained at that time—or ever.

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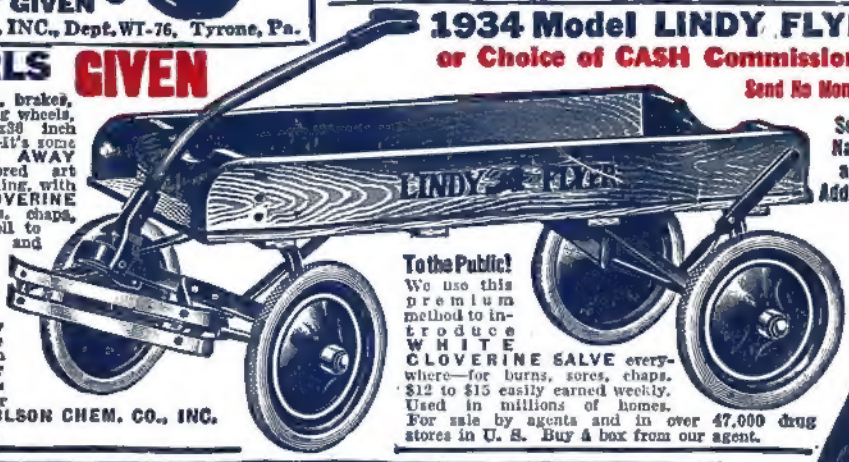

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10 cts.

Chinese Fragrant Tree Fern

Just introduced; noted for its rapid growth. An exceptionally pretty ornamental plant. Foliage is rich dark green. Forms grand pyramidal bushes about 6 feet high. Branches very desirable for decorative purposes, wreaths, etc. **Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.**

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NATURE'S WEATHER PROPHET By mysterious changes that take place, this remarkable plant accurately forecasts the weather many hours in advance. Will grow anywhere all the year around. An interesting house plant. Bears large, fragrant, pink, butterfly shape flowers. **Seeds, 10c packet, 3 for 40c, postpaid**

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Amazingly Prolific—Easily Grown From Seed

The Ground Almond has a flavor that is MOST EXCELLENT, resembling the cocoanut. The meat is snow white, covered with a shell or skin of brown color. It grows close to the surface and anything from 200 to 300 Almonds may be expected from a single nut. There is no trouble whatever in growing anywhere and in any kind of soil. May be planted any time, and in eight or ten weeks from time of planting you will have an ENORMOUS CROP of the MOST DELICIOUS ALMONDS YOU EVER TASTED. **Seeds 10c Pkt.**

Chinese Cabbage

Novelty from China and should be grown in every garden. Seems to be a cross between Celery and Cos Lettuce. Flavor is more mild than any other cabbage. **Can be served on the table** and eaten raw or cooked like cabbage, spinach or lettuce or made into salad. Grows very rapidly, easy to cultivate. You can create quite a sensation by cultivating this remarkable novelty **Seeds, 15c packet, 3 pkts. for 40c.**

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This splendid ornamental tree is a native of China, and is called the Tree of Heaven, on account of its great beauty. Very hardy, thrives in any soil, no matter how poor, and grows from 6 to 10 feet high from seed the first summer. The leaves are from 6 to 9 feet in any length, giving it a grand appearance. Nothing outside the tropics can rival it for lawn decoration. Large panicles of bloom, followed in season by great clusters of colored seed pods, make the tree a continual thing of beauty. **Packet, 15c; 3 packets 40c**

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A Vine that Blooms at Night

Fills the Atmosphere with Fragrant Aroma

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The Great Wonderberry

A luscious berry that may be grown and ripened from seed in any soil or climate in 3 months. The flavor is fine and surpassed for eating raw, cooked, canned or preserved in any form. The fruit is blue-black in color, and tastes like a luscious, rich blueberry. One bush will produce an enormous amount of fruit, yielding great masses of rich fruit all Summer and Fall. **Packet, 10c, 3 pkts. for 25c, postpaid.**

Shoo Fly Plant

A very remarkable Botanical curiosity you should have. Though quite odorless it is said flies will not remain in a room where it is grown. Bears very pretty blossoms; blooms summer and winter. Grows rapidly from seed. **SEEDS 15c pkt., 3 for 40c, postpaid.**

Banana Musk Melon

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The Great Japanese Umbrella Palm

A Graceful Household Conservatory Plant

Easily Grown From Seed Winter or Summer

The Japanese Umbrella Palm is a semi-aquatic plant. It is easily grown from seed either in a bowl of water or in very damp soil. Probably the most usual, as well as the most interesting method, is to cultivate the plant in a bowl or jardiniere filled with water, with two or three inches of good garden soil at the bottom. The seeds soon commence to germinate, and the plant shooots up stems two to three feet high and rapidly assumes a most pretty palm-like appearance, as shown in the engraving. The tops of the stems are crowned by a whorl of umbrella-shaped leaves, of a waxy appearance. We will send a package of this seed, with full instructions for culture, for only 15c or three packets for 40c postpaid.

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Blooms only at night, giving forth the most delightful scented fragrance for quite a distance. Causes much comment. For house or garden. Also valuable because of rare perfume made from it. **SEEDS, 10c pkt., 3 for 25c.**

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